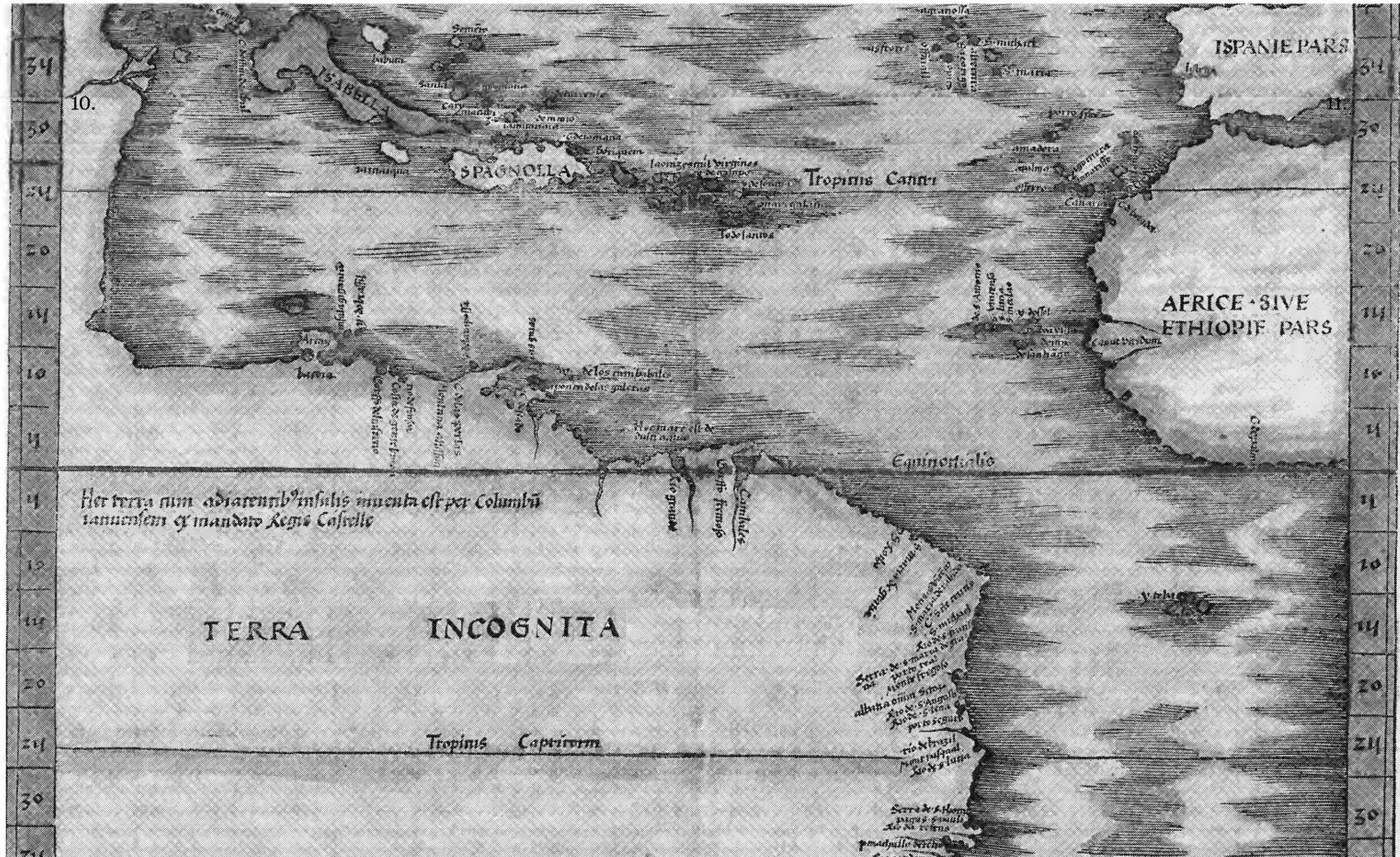


ERROR  
INCOG  
NITA

**ERROR  
INCOG  
NITA**









*against every map • for every terrortory  
for every bomb threat • against every telephone  
against every for • for every against*

---

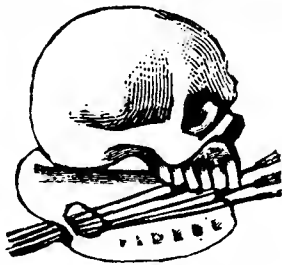
To demand an explanation or apology, contact your future  
co-defendants at: [terrorincognita@riseup.net](mailto:terrorincognita@riseup.net)

Design by the troletariat. COME AT ME: [Anarchistnews.org](http://Anarchistnews.org)

***The terrorINC production committee:***



*Editing*



*Design*



*Insurrection*

# terror INC ATI

---

An outsize barnacle clinging to the hull of *Vörtex*  
Another organ (without bodies) of the Experimentation Committee  
A meditation on seduction, desire, and insurrection  
The abyss gaping beneath each skipped heartbeat

4.



*This is  
the anarchist  
project:*

**FIGHT  
FEAR WITH  
TERROR,  
LET THE  
WORLD  
*Burn***



### **Nomos**

/from the Greek νόμος/ includes not only explicit laws, but all the unwritten rules and social constructs that stabilize and govern our lives. Sociologists describe nomos as *a shield against terror*: the veil between consensus reality and the chaos that lies beyond.

# NO NOMOS

### **Tromos**

/from the Greek τρόμος/ signifies *terror*: trembling in the face of the unknown, the timeless passport of all who cross the line.

# ALL TROMOS

---

*against consensus reality • for unreasoning rebellion  
against fixed identity • for desertion and disruption*

## FOLLOWING TERROR TO DEATH AND BEYOND

We have to think beyond the politics of consent because we don't desire terror, in the sense of embracing it as a conscious positive goal. Terror is not an objective to which we say yes or no. Rather, it is the inevitable result of hurling ourselves into the fires of transformation. We want terrible freedom, moments of rupture that force us into new worlds where our previous desires are exceeded so fantastically that we can't even remember them. Perhaps there is no prospect more terrifying.

Consensus reality grips us so powerfully that we find it less frightening to die within it than to live outside of it. So long as we remain within its grasp, even our deaths can be appropriate and functional. States and nationalist projects strive ceaselessly to appropriate death: the war memorials and September 11th speeches, the posters of the martyrs of the intifada. Perhaps this is why the death of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia resonated so broadly: finally, a death that did not serve the project of state domination! The self-immolating protestor terrifies us by refusing to enter into consensus with the state, right up to the point of death—yet we imagine him facing his terror, choosing his path on his own terms. Perhaps such deaths can help us imagine the possibility of living courageously, as well. Perhaps if we're bold enough to face it, we'll find that in releasing ourselves to terror, we overcome our fears.

There can be no freedom, let alone liberation, until we confront the things that terrify us most. In this regard, when we experience terror, it is a sign that we are finally on the right path. Rather than an affliction, a *boundary*, terror could be the star by which we navigate into a world beyond our wildest dreams. We can't argue that the world we reach will be “better,” in the sense of being more in line with our current framework of desires.

**But we can say that the moments in our lives that really mattered, the ones worth telling as stories, occurred when we stared terror in the face —**

**and stepped forward off the cliff.**

**In queer sex that  
deterritorializes our  
bodies, in riots that  
unchart the maps  
striating the space of our  
lives, we long to seduce  
and be seduced, to find  
that in the margins and  
gutters of world we are  
not alone, but  
powerful.**

## QUEER PERIPHERIES AS TERRITORIES

The most politically interesting senses of queer locate it at the antagonistic margins of dominant forces, sexual or otherwise—a periphery that is always shifting in relation to centers of power. In this light, the flight into territory is a queer project.

If this is true, it's not important for anarchists to *be* queer, whatever that might mean, so much as it is for us to seek out peripheral positions from which to attack consensus reality, seducing others into these zones of possibility. Fascinating innovations in relationships and sexuality continue to emerge from queer communities because marginality catalyzes creative resistance. Likewise, our political queerness and rejection of respectability afford us a perspective from which we can continue to precipitate ruptures in the ruling social order.

Just as radical queers undermine their potential by attempting to become an interest group with a stake in civil society, anarchists will not succeed by seeking to escape marginality. We can debate whether dropping out into subculture empowers or isolates us, but it's clear that whatever power we have proceeds from our practice of clustering on political peripheries and striking from there. We don't have to avoid compromise at all costs—rather, we should only make compromises that undermine the stability of the center instead of drawing us closer to it. We can participate in coalitions, so long as our participation always exposes the limitations of internal consensus and consensus reality.

## I. CONSENT • SEDUCTION • VIOLENCE

THE MAYDAY

●DEBACLE

You know the story. Friends spread the word; others come in from out of town. Somebody puts up fliers and stickers; some might or might not have advertised it as a “queer dance party.” Some idiot posts it on Facebook. There’s a buzz. Last year it was cool, could have been better though; this year it’s gonna get wild.

**Boom.** Ten minutes, eighteen thousand dollars in damage, eleven arrests, sixty-five thousand dollars in bail. A week of frenzied legal support, consoling terrified parents, borrowing respectable clothes for court, assuming every blue sedan is full of faceless enemies.

We sit in a park in a tight circle, with an out-of-town facilitator in hopes of easing tension. Lots of anger to vent, critiques to advance, defensive planning to do. One theme comes up again and again: *it wasn’t consensual*. We didn’t know what we were getting into; we didn’t have any way to choose or to get out safely when we figured out we weren’t into what was going on. And even those of us who didn’t go and had nothing to do with it have to deal with the consequences as a town. We didn’t consent to this. What do we do now?

TRASHING

T

We’re invited to make a presentation at the anarchist book fair; they schedule us at the very end of the last day. Brainstorming, we realize we can’t just do another panel discussion after dozens of droning speakers. Whenever we act, we set a precedent: if we’re calling for people to interrupt the routine functioning of capitalism, we’d better interrupt the consumerist daze of the book fair. So fuck a well-mannered presentation.

Rumors circulate and the room is packed for us. One of the book fair organizers is there. I tell her that she’ll be a little surprised, but not to worry, it’s going to be fine. The lights dim and my co-presenter rolls in a shopping cart full of commodities. She pours wine into a glass as she begins her speech; she continues pouring when it reaches the brim and begins to flow down her arm and onto the floor. She drops the glass, then heaves the bottle aloft and lets it fall with a crash. She repeats this with bottle after bottle, then sets about destroying the other contents of the cart.

Another book fair organizer runs in, distressed at the noise, but the first one quiets him, repeating my assurance that everything will be fine. Flour fills the air, settling everywhere like snow, turning to red paste in the

THE

CONTINUING

APPEAL OF SEX

AND VIOLENCE

But really, why all the fuss about sex and violence? Why are anarchists so hung up on breaking windows and fucking? Are these the only spaces in which terror and the unknown can come into play? Perhaps we fetishize riots and sex as the last frontiers of unmediated relation to the body. What are you doing after the riot or the orgy or whatever, after all? Let’s all die on the barricades in the throes of orgasm, confident for the first time that we’re really alive!

We risk years in prison for the rush of glass shattering beneath our hammers, or pregnancies and diseases for the thrill of intertwining our sweaty flesh. Are the eroticism of rebellion and the rebelliousness of the erotic all we have left, the last rapidly eroding foothold of unmediated embodiment? When every acre has been mapped, can we imagine no other zones of possibility beyond our own unpredictable limbs? Is the body the last territory?

Terror is an erotic feeling. No center can cohere without eroticizing its periphery. The line between disgust and desire is far more porous than most of us care to admit. This is why *seduction* best characterizes our politics: spreading anarchy is an erotic process, not a rational one. This isn’t to say we have to give up distributing ’zines and crafting careful critiques—but we will not argue and reason our way into an anarchist society. We might, however, seduce our way into unexpected affinities, transform the margins into volatile peripheries, and infect the body politic with subversive desires.

69.

LOL

Queer bodies terrify because of their refusal to conform to narratives of appropriate, authorized penetration. Hetero-patriarchal sexual narratives strive to make penetration predictable and unidirectional; queers interpenetrate, destroying the boundaries between self and the other, merging the erotic object and subject, being filled with it and becoming it, showing a radical potential for reciprocity. They’re right to fear and hate us; queer sex declares war on the striation of the body, reclaiming it as terror incognita.

Sounds good, doesn’t it? But wait—hasn’t queer sex been reterritorialized by the apparatuses of state and capital? Is there anything inherently radical about sex between people of similar anatomy? We can fight to make our own bodies into territories, zones of radical potential. But we’ll never get there from within the cozy confines of queer identity. If deterritorialized sexuality is reserved for those of certain bodies or sexual identities, then it remains an identitarian rather than a seductive goal. If queer is to have any meaning, we have to transform our sex lives into a space where queer desires—which circulate without reference to citizenship in any queer nation—can take terrifying hold of us and spread.



52.

## SECURITY AND SECRECY

Old mapmakers scrawled *terra incognita*—unknown land—over regions yet to be explored. The phrase conjures images from the medieval bestiary: fiery dragons soaring over secret seas, one-eyed men alongside gold-hoarding griffins. Allure, mystery, terror. But with the expansion of state and mercantile power, the extension of the Christian missionary impulse, and the triumph of scientific discourse, these unknown zones became colonies to conquer, markets to penetrate, unsaved souls to convert—frontiers to *discover*. When Napoleon led his expedition to Egypt armed not only with soldiers and cannons but an array of engineers, scientists, and indeed cartographers, he inaugurated the modern era of governance: total conquest through total knowledge.

State power is a cartographic project: an effort to map and graph and delineate all territory so as to administer it. From the earliest efforts to systematically survey territory and its inhabitants, through imperial Roman censuses and William the Conqueror's Domesday book in 11th century England, rulers have seen mapping, accounting, and enumerating as crucial to control. One of the first steps of the state apparatus in striating space is literally girding it in lines of latitude and longitude, elevation and topography.

This pursuit of total knowledge through mapping extends to the populations of states as well as their territories. Look at the state's strategy in recent years for targeting radical social movements: prosecutors press conspiracy charges, using subpoenas, undercover agents, and social media platforms like Facebook to map relationships between potential insurgents. The strategy to criminalize of youth of color operates similarly: expansive regulations targeting “gangs,” anti-loitering ordinances, video cameras on streetlamps at every intersection in the projects.

Wherever people come together on their own terms, they become a threat that must be managed by surveillance. Conspiracy is secretive; withholding knowledge, however innocuous, threatens the security state's need to know all.

As an officer once said in requesting community assistance with an investigation, *a cop is only as good as his information*. Whoever came up with the saying “secrets don't make friends” had it dead wrong. Secrets make friendships; keeping secrets keeps friends, and can keep them out of jail as well.

And secrets are threats. Our secrets terrify. Our conspiracies open secret passages into *terror incognita*.

## TERROR AND CONTAGION

In his introduction to *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes described the state via an extended metaphor of the body, with different parts and functions corresponding to those of the state. In this metaphor, he identified sedition with sickness. The urge to rebel is indeed infectious. The FBI attempts to track it epidemiologically. In crowds, it can spread like wildfire, reaching epidemic proportions.

Fear of contagion often reduces to a fear of being penetrated. The discourses deployed to target scapegoats reveal a disquietingly sexual theme. Spies and infiltrators penetrate secure networks; homosexuals and pervers penetrate forbidden parts of the body. Illegal immigrants penetrate the border, despite the 700-mile chastity belt across it. The brutal violence against scapegoats likewise takes on horrifyingly erotic casts: white obsession with the bodies of black men, the sexual mutilations that often accompanied lynchings, the forced sterilization of women of color on welfare, hysterical hyperbole about gay male promiscuity by the God Hates Fags set. Terror of penetration by subversive elements haunts the wet dream nightmares of our rulers.

## III. THE CHRISTMAS BOOT

I'll be the first to admit that I'm a kinky weirdo, but never in my life had I imagined myself licking a boot. It wasn't a secret desire I had repressed; I was perfectly aware of people with foot or uniform or leather fetishes, which I regarded with polite indifference. The thought had never popped into my mind while masturbating, nor had I felt the urge while having sex with a booted lover. And since then, it hasn't re-entered my sexual repertoire—I never sought it out again nor really even seriously considered it. It stands alone, a monument to a specific time and place.

It was at the yearly queer anti-Christmas holiday our crew of anarchist friends had created. For four years running, we'd hosted it at our punk house, as it grew from a potluck with a few gifts exchanged to a whole festival of zany performances, costumes, unicorn piñatas, spin the bottle games, and dancing in a carnivalesque atmosphere. That night we were all intoxicated, not by alcohol but by the strange chasm of possibility that seemed to have opened up, as if we had permission to break all the rules that governed our jocular insurrecto-bromances and responsible polyamory.

As the music pounded, a crew of us in the kitchen hovered around a cake, then started feeding it to each other, then smearing it on each other and making out. I headed over and before long was slurping frosting off a neighbor's neck while my ex's partner ground up against me from behind. Soon I was on my back on the kitchen floor, dizzy with excitement and exhilaration, kissing somebody while someone else pulled my hair. And then I saw it: his black leather boot, planted on my chest, with a burning stare from behind black-rimmed glasses fixed on me from above. I squirmed in feverish delight while the boot ground onto my collarbone, and then like a thunderbolt from hell, it hit me: *I need to lick this boot*. There could not possibly be anything hotter, more appropriate, more desirable, more reasonable than to lick this boot on my chest right now with all these people watching me.

And I did. Tasting that musky leather tang on my vegan tongue, watching the demented light in the eyes of my friend as he pressed his foot down, I felt a delirious surge of filthy desire and satisfaction unlike anything I could remember.

## THE BOOKFAIR

wine and broken glass; smashed furniture and food and computers pile up in a tangled mess, liquid spreading across the floor; my comrade is cutting her clothes off with scissors, smearing blood across her face. I appear with a bullhorn; another friend is turning over tables and throwing chairs. The audience is paralyzed.

They give us two standing ovations. It takes us an hour to clean up—good thing we brought cleaning supplies. The organizer takes me aside: “That was great, but I'm glad you didn't ask permission. We could never have consented to let it happen.” This is strange: everyone is happy with what we did, yet no one would have permitted it if they'd had a choice. The organizers are liable for the space: that makes them the Most Affected, the ones responsible anarchists believe should have the strongest voice in any decision. How can we justify sidestepping them? Our experiment is a perfect illustration of the maxim that it's better to ask forgiveness than permission—but isn't that contrary to the spirit of consent?

And if this is complicated, how much more complicated is it when a few people like us start a real riot that no one would have consented to, but everyone is proud of afterwards?

10.

**S**o: we are anarchists. That is, we are a small, isolated minority of extremists. We believe fervently, and with good justification, that our political goals—including the destruction of capitalism, the state, and hierarchy—can’t be accomplished without strategies and tactics that are unpalatable to the majority of our fellow citizens. At the same time, we’re not vanguardists; we reject the notion of “leading” others or imposing our will on them. We are anti-authoritarians both in the worlds we desire to create and in the means by which we struggle towards them. How do we navigate this contradiction?

Also: we are sexual creatures. We want to love and be loved, to suck and fuck and kiss and caress, to subject ourselves and each other to all sorts of horrible and wonderful desires and experiences. We want to do these things, and we want to do them in ways that strengthen rather than diminish, that respect the dignity and autonomy of our lovers while securing the same for ourselves. Yet we are immersed in a rape culture that discourages communicative sexuality and offers few tools for relating in mutually respectful ways. How do we overcome this?

We’ve developed a practice of prioritizing *consent* as a provisional answer to these distinct but overlapping questions. We seek to respect others’ autonomy by not subjecting them to actions that violate their consent—that is, by staying within the boundaries of others’ desires as they determine and articulate them. We reject coercion of any form, whether physical, verbal, economic, or otherwise, and assert our self-determination to participate in or abstain from whatever we choose.

Yet outside of the sexual realm, consent discourse doesn’t always offer a sufficient framework with which to evaluate direct action tactics and strategy. Whether an action is consensual may not suffice to indicate whether it is effective or worthwhile. Knowing that most people oppose some of our tactics, we don’t plan our actions on the basis of consent, yet we don’t aspire to become a vanguard either. Furthermore, since we can only desire on the basis of what we know, it seems likely that liberation won’t come simply from fulfilling the desires we have now without changing the conditions that produced them. So how else might we conceive of our project as anarchists, if not through the lens of consent?

In a way, this essay is our worst nightmare. A close examination of our activities reveals that in setting out to foment insurrection, we appear to be operating according to a logic of *seduction* rather than consent.

## IS CONSENT ENOUGH?

In our subculture, we’ve seen a shift in our norms around sexuality due to courageous efforts—mostly by women—to create new standards of sexual interaction rooted in verbal consent. This has shifted how we relate to each other on both sexual and non-sexual levels in many positive ways. Over the years, we’ve co-authored puppet shows and ’zines on consent, proposed policies for conferences and gatherings to promote consensual interaction, and facilitated accountability processes when consent has been violated. In spite of failures and limitations, and against the anti-PC scum who’ve opposed consent discourse for threatening their sense of entitlement, we see these developments as profoundly transformative, central to what we value most about anarchism.

At first glance, the notion of basing our political practice on a theory of consent makes intuitive sense. What’s our critique of the state? It’s a body that wields power over us, even to the point of life and death, and yet no one ever asked us if we wanted to be governed. Elections don’t even begin to offer us the meaningful alternatives true consent would require; as we’ve said before, our desires will never appear on ballots. A key anarchist principle is voluntary association—the ability to form whatever groups and collectives we want without being compelled to participate in any. We never had the chance to say no to capitalism, to government, to police, to all the systems of hierarchy that impose their rule—so clearly those can’t be consensual in any meaningful way. As we do away with the coercive systems that dominate our lives, we can reconstruct new social relations based on consent: a world in which no one controls anyone else, in which we can determine our own destinies.

It makes sense... doesn’t it? Certainly this discourse of consent offers a compelling way to imagine

51.

constant war against these alternatives, supported by white supremacy as an ideological incentive for exploited Europeans to identify with their masters against their African fellow workers, the North American colonies would never have survived. The United States’s racial nightmare of genocide, slavery, and exploitation originated in the terror of the European ruling classes, whose entire project of domination was threatened by the allure of the peripheries.

Who do we find in a territory? It is inhabited by the people all Kurtzes mean when they whisper, “Exterminate all the brutes!”<sup>12</sup> The imaginations of rulers have populated territories with a series of scapegoats, pushed into the spotlight to be demonized and then discarding them when the next threat arose. During the Cold War, the ruling class attacked Communists and labor agitators, along with homosexuals and other sexual deviants. For over a century, they have blamed immigrants, recently emphasizing Mexicans and other Latin Americans. Since the 1970s, as the prison-industrial complex has expanded, politicians have targeted criminals, sexual predators, drug addicts, and young men of color. Since September 2001, Muslims have come under their scrutiny. At other times, anarchists, Jews, welfare recipients and other poor people, and a great many more have found themselves in the crosshairs as rulers fought to redirect discontent towards the powerless.

The profusion of scapegoated demographics indicates the insecurity of our rulers despite the expansiveness of their control: we see this in the proliferation of gated communities with armed guards and CCTV cameras even as violent crime rates drop. No technologies can abate their terror so long as sinister peripheries and furtive longings lurk in the shadows of their minds. The cast of monstrous characters projected onto territories share two key features: they operate *secretly*, spreading subversion under the radar, and they are *contagious*, infecting the unsuspecting with their illicit desires.

12.

Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* personifies the European colonial project in the depraved ivory trader Kurtz.

transportation, communication, and military technology advanced to such a point that states can prevent people from escaping. As the state marches us towards a brave new world of total control, that shrinking fraction of undefined space is the house of war, a zone of terror.

Mountainous areas have often been among the territories most difficult to rule. High-elevation regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan that have resisted state control are represented as havens for Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The War on Terror provides the ultimate impetus for bringing every square inch of the globe into the web of surveillance and control; these few slender territories free from state domination now constitute threats to the security of the United States. If the authorities can't reach them with tanks, they can target them with drones; what can't be colonized can at least be destroyed. The project begun during the Cold War of imposing neocolonial domination on all non-aligned states continues in the anti-terrorism era, as the last regions that declined to be ruled by communism or capitalist democracy are tamed.

The land mines US troops spread across parts of Southeast Asia during the Cold War anticipated the project of total control advanced by the War on Terror. By rendering regions unlivable that were antagonistic to state control, they opened the final chapter in the struggle of the state to dominate all human societies. In the guise of an internecine quarrel, the superpowers expressed their mutual terror of autonomous peoples by imposing regimes of fear: the sudden explosion that maims a forest dweller, the platoon that shoots without warning regardless of which side you're on. Petty despots in Latin America waged parallel campaigns as dictators and paramilitary death squads imposed fear as a way of life among indigenous communities from Guatemala to Chile. Now in parts of the Middle East, no one can escape the fear that a remote-controlled aircraft will rain death upon them from the sky.

The domain of the state has expanded so far, and with such brutal consequences, that life beyond it has become nearly unthinkable. Margaret Thatcher's infamous declaration "There is no alternative" has become the goal and vision of the security state. It aims to create the *dar al-islam*—peace through universal submission to authority—by waging endless war against all who challenge its monopoly on control and violence.

All space outside the control of the security state is, by definition, the realm of terror. Let's call these regions of possibility *terrortory*.

## BLANK SPOTS ON THE MAP: *Terrortory and Its Discontents*

Terrortory is non-striated space. When every territory has been plotted within the latitudes of power and longitudes of control, it is the *terror incognita*, the frontiers of the unknown beyond the edges of the map. It is the destination of our lines of flight. It is what lies outside consensus reality.

Close your eyes and imagine feeling terror. What do you see? Is it a person, an event, a setting, an environment? Throughout millennia of struggle between civilization and wildness, most who fought on the former side would have named places or landscapes. Frontiers and forests, the wilderness and the jungle: these areas loomed in the imagination, reminding us of the constant struggle between the gaping unknown and the precarious enclaves of civilization. But the spread of the state, combined with new technologies of destruction, allowed the balance of that struggle to swing toward the civilized, who ferociously domesticated wild landscapes and the peoples who inhabited them. Now, as the forces of state and capital methodically eliminate the last social groups that resist civilized control, we're losing memory of any mode of life outside the binary of absolute control or absolute terror.

The "state of nature," described by Thomas Hobbes as the primordial chaos from which all people strive to escape into the reassurance of state control, is the original terrortory. Life under state rule, which for the majority of its victims proved more "nasty, brutish, and short" than life outside of it, had to be justified by positing an even worse alternative. Yet in the first centuries of European immigration to North America, thousands of colonists "went native," deserting to live among indigenous tribes. Maroon colonies of escaped slaves, indigenous locals, and poor white escapees flourished in the swamps and borderlands. Without a

the world we want to live in. But how does it serve as a strategy for dislodging this one? It's difficult to imagine a political practice that stringently respects the consent of all people while simultaneously destroying the fabric of our hierarchical society. If we insist on the unity of means and ends, we have to dismantle coercive institutions and social relationships through non-coercive processes to build a non-coercive society. Abandoning this vision could undermine the very basis of our anarchism. Yet if we don't dismantle the coercive apparatuses of state and capital, we'll never arrive at a society in which a consent-based framework could actually be tenable.

How can we resolve these dilemmas? Let's look more closely at what we mean by consent, and how it operates in our society and radical movements against it.

## CONSENSUS REALITY, NONVIOLENCE, LIBERAL CONSENT

Power and consent are critically intertwined. Power imbalances make it difficult or impossible to give consent freely. Can a much older person have consensual sex with a very young person? Can someone who is subjected to another's economic control freely consent to that person's desires? For consent to be meaningful, it must be possible to say no, any time and for any reason, on one's own terms. When the state monopolizes the use of force and the economy controls access to our very means of survival, we cannot meaningfully choose. We call the boundaries enclosing our ability to consent under these conditions *consensus* reality.

Consensus reality is the range of possible thought and action within a system of power relations. It is enforced not only through traditional institutions of control—such as mass media, religion, and socialization—but also through the innumerable subtle norms manifested in common sense, civil discourse, and day-to-day life. It isn't simply the aggregate of all

our desires, melded together in a great compromise that allows us all to get along, as democratic mythology would have it. Consensus reality constitutes the ruling class's coordinated attempt to uphold their dominance and our exploitation as efficiently as possible. Capitalist democracy secures that efficiency; it is the system that currently provides the largest number of people with incentive to participate in their own exploitation. It offers a series of meaningless options to disguise a profound lack of agency over our own lives. The trump card of capitalist democracy is the idea that everyone's consent is respected in a marketplace of ideas within which desires can be freely expressed and influenced.

We can argue that this marketplace isn't truly free—corporations control the mass media, some views get more airtime than others, thus the consent is not fully informed—but this doesn't get at the heart of things. Obviously, equal access to means of influence on a level playing field is impossible in capitalist society. But it is the systems of *power*, not just speech, that determine the framework within which we experience reality. All political systems—anarchist, fascist, and democratic—produce particular patterns of social relations. Mere discussion of these systems does not; it cannot transcend the framework in which it occurs.<sup>1</sup> Free speech discourse offers each of us our own box of colored chalk to decorate the cement blocks around our feet, and calls that freedom; whether we can walk away doesn't even enter into the picture. Our experience of what we are and aren't able to do determines our sense of what is possible far more than our ideas and discourses. To shift the boundaries of our imagination and desires, we have to find ways to make new experiences possible beyond the bounds of consensus reality.

Take, for example, the debates about violence and nonviolence that rage in every organizing coalition and Occupy movement. What is violence? At first glance, the term seems to have no more coherence than the Supreme Court definition of obscenity: *I can't define it, but I know it when I see it*. This makes it an especially dangerous tool when wielded by liberals to control group norms. But recalling that *violence* springs from the same root as *violation* helps us get at the meaning behind how the word is used. What is called violence is any violation of norms about legitimate use of force, norms dictated by the state and incorporated into our consensus reality. The debate about violence is really a



## 1.

For instance, within capitalist democracy, the very ability to speak “freely” seems to offer proof of the system’s justice by virtue of the state ensuring “free speech.” In anarchic social relations, our ability to speak freely is self-justifying, needing no state to “protect” it or define its limits. When expressing our desires is contextualized as “exercising a right,” our legitimacy to act is defined in terms of our relationship to the state rather than by virtue of our desires being inherently valid.

## 2.

This has happened again and again, from the post-inauguration Adams Morgan march in Washington DC in 2005 to the Oscar Grant riots, any time collective action isn’t peaceful, legal, and fully pacified. People who are more vulnerable to state violence or other potential consequences of escalation—and, more often, self-appointed spokespeople whose privilege enables them feel entitled to represent others—speak out against militant tactics. Since many anarchist agitators are shielded in part by the privileges of white skin, a male body, no children, legal citizenship, and other forms of armor denied to others, it is held to be irresponsible to raise the stakes without the input of more vulnerable people who may be affected. Anarchists often counter that those shielded by privilege are precisely the ones who should put their bodies on the line. But in large mixed crowds with a potential for explosive conflict, the question of consent inevitably rears its head. Self-righteous anarcho-leftists assume that the purpose of massing in the streets is simply to “speak truth to power,” but the rest of us have to grapple with how to precipitate conflict in ways that don’t reinforce the wedges our enemies would drive between us “bad protestors” and our potential comrades.

coded discourse in which nonviolence stands in for consent; as anarchists attempting to make space for autonomy and diversity of tactics, our opponents perceive us as disregarding consent simply for opposing the terms of consensus reality<sup>2</sup>.

Observe how an anxious liberal from our local Occupy movement, dismayed by an illegal building occupation undertaken by autonomous occupiers, strives to distance the Occupy group from the occupation. He says to a reporter: “Our movement is nonviolent, it is peaceful, and it does not break the law.” The building occupation involved no physical violence, nor damage to property, nor anything that could be construed as violent even within this liberal’s own definition, whereas the eviction by rifle-wielding thugs was violent enough to shock people across the political spectrum. How can we make sense of such a seeming contradiction?

It seems that the meaningful sense of *violence* here is a rupture of consensus reality. This liberal wished to communicate that the building occupation felt like a violation of his consent. Why? Because it was related to a current in which he felt invested, yet he had not been invited to participate in decision-making, and it involved actions that he personally disdained. Of course, we undertook the occupation autonomously precisely for that reason: we knew we could never achieve consensus in the public general assemblies to do something that so dramatically challenged consensus reality. Whether or not the occupation hurt anyone was beside the point: its “violence” had less to do with its literal effects than its challenge to consensus reality. The implication was that such a challenge constituted a disregard of collective consent.

Let’s call this *liberal consent*: the notion that we must adhere tactically to the most conservative common denominator or else violate others’ consent. We all have to put up with this system, so the logic goes, whether we chose it or not, because any violation would put us all at risk. This goes beyond a critique of representation—you shouldn’t carry out an action on my behalf without my consent—to a critique of autonomy, since literally any action that presumes affinity with others is subject to the boundaries dictated by consensus reality.

## OCCUPYING THE HOUSE OF WAR: Terror and State Control

Imām Abū Hanīfah, an eighth-century Sunni Muslim theologian from Iraq, developed a framework that has exercised lasting influence on Islamic theology. He distinguished between *dar al-harb*, literally the “house” [domain, abode, territory] of war, and *dar al-islam*, the house of peace. *Dar al-islam* represents the regions where the Islamic faith dominates and tranquility presumably reigns as a result of people living in accordance with the will of God, while *dar al-harb* designates the regions not governed by Islamic rulers and law. This is a legal rather than religious distinction: the difference between the house of Islam and the house of war is not determined by the percentage of Muslims in a region, but by what political system governs it. The designation “house of war” refers both to the assumption that any territory that has not submitted to the will of God will endure constant strife, and to the call for Muslims to undertake holy war against unbelievers.

The “houses” are defined thus because Islamic traditions, in contrast to those of Christianity, tend to emphasize proper conduct (orthopraxy) over proper belief (orthodoxy). In this view, how people behave is more important than what they believe. The pagan cults of the Roman Empire operated similarly: as long as a Roman citizen observed the prescribed rituals, he could profess whatever beliefs he wanted.

In contrast, Christian traditions of defining orthodoxy and persecuting heresy valued the profession of proper belief above all; merely behaving in accord with Christian precepts did not guarantee salvation. This emphasis on orthodoxy persisted through the Cold War, with its McCarthyist witch-hunts and loyalty oaths. The government promoted social conformity and patriotism to cement correct beliefs, and professing an improper creed could be lethal.

However, with the triumph of mass consumer society in the aftermath of the Cold War, orthopraxy has supplanted orthodoxy as the dominant paradigm for governance. Belief has been relegated to

the same realm as religion: private, subjective, unobtrusive, optional. In the age of internet irony, earnestness is laughable, dogmatism contemptible, credulity hilarious. Whatever power satire once had has dissolved in the general undermining of all faith.

In the postmodern US, you needn’t participate in rituals like voting or July 4th parades. All that matters is that you keep going to work, keep shopping, keep doing what you are told by authority figures. When the retail chain that employs you shows a video explaining that stealing from the store is really stealing from yourself, you can snicker with your coworkers on your smoke break all you want—so long as the till adds up correctly at the end of the day. Trumpet at the top of your lungs that the government is corrupt, capitalism is the crisis, consumerism is destroying the planet. Just make sure that when you act on your dissident beliefs, you do so by canvassing for a third party candidate or driving your hybrid to the co-op to buy high-efficiency light bulbs.

Resistance that moves beyond speech, that challenges orthopraxy via heretical *action*, is another matter entirely. In the electronic era, when control no longer hinges on geographical space but on diffuse networks of power, the “house of war” is everywhere and nowhere, requiring eternal vigilance and omnipresent surveillance. Today’s authorities utilize technologies of control that the Abrahamic religions could have only dreamed of. Imagine the inquisitions a papacy armed with RFID chips, CCTV cameras, and satellite-guided drones could have carried out. Yet even with such tools at their disposal, the terror of the authorities in the face of the *dar al-harb* only grows more frantic. As the experience of being governed becomes universal, the perceived threat of any alternative looms ever larger.

As James Scott discusses in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, his history of resistance to the state in upland Southeast Asia, for the vast majority of our species’ tenure human beings have lived without state power, or near enough to expansive stateless regions that they could escape. This placed limits on the depredations to which states could subject people, since individual flight and collective exodus remained viable options. Only in the past few centuries has state control extended to encompass the vast majority of the world’s population, and only in the past several decades have

## TERRORISM AND TERROR

What is terrorism? There is no universally accepted definition. This ambiguity is strategic in the post-Cold War era, as the definition can be shifted in different political climates to inflame different fears and target different enemies. In this regard, it has proven far more versatile than communism: although a wide range of political adversaries were smeared with the red brush, communism had real-world reference points—including governments—that placed concrete limits on the imagination.

During the Cold War, the US government played on symmetrical fears of nuclear annihilation to build the military-industrial complex and advance imperial and capitalist power. By contrast, in the era of the War on Terror, it relies on the threat of asymmetrical terror to advance a neoliberal surveillance society. The principal antagonists no longer form an “evil empire” comprising a defined territory threatening other territories, but a shadowy “international network,” everywhere and nowhere, fighting on the terrain of the “hearts and minds” of the population. The figure of the terrorist is an ideal adversary for the neoliberal state; detached from territorial defense, unlimited warfare can proceed on every front, demanding more and more total forms of control.

According to the US State Department, terrorism is “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies,” adding that “religious, political, or other ideological beliefs” often motivate it. So one key aspect of terrorism is *thought crime*—not just acting, but doing so because of a belief or ideology. Another is that it must be illegal and undertaken by a non-state actor, challenging the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence. The original 2002 US State Department definition of terrorism—“premeditated, politically motivated violence against innocents”—was changed some months later because it did not

categorically exclude actions of the US government.

Although this is more controversial, not all definitions of terrorism require that terroristic actions involve actual harm to people. As critics of US domestic anti-terrorism policy often cite, for many years the number one domestic terrorism threat listed by the FBI has been the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), whose most militant actions have resulted in neither deaths nor injuries. An FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force that focuses on political radicals consulted with our local police department after a recent anarchist building occupation that involved neither violence nor the threat of it. By contrast, anti-abortion, anti-immigrant, Neo-Nazi, and other right-wing groups in the US have killed and injured numerous people and threatened countless others, yet receive scant attention compared to activists who challenge the property of developers or vivisectioners.

Many radicals respond by asserting that the government’s definitions of terrorism have more to do with the political beliefs of the supposed “terrorists” than the harm that they cause. They speak of “state terrorism,” citing the US government’s use of violence against noncombatants to coerce obedience or protect economic interests. Calling someone a terrorist rather than an enemy combatant, criminal, freedom fighter, or insurgent says more about the interests of the labeler than the actions of those labeled.

Yet for the purposes of this exploration, let’s assume that these official definitions of terrorism tell us something valuable. The choice of whom the state considers terrorists—and of framing their objective as *terror*—reveals something crucial about what the neoliberal security state perceives as threatening.

***The most terrifying specter for any managers—government, activist, or otherwise—is an element that cannot be controlled by bringing it into the political consensus mediated by the state. This is what we call terrorism.***

## CAN WE RESCUE THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF CONSENT?

So liberal consent is a tool for defending consensus reality, useless to our project of liberation. But that doesn’t necessarily mean we have to give up on the discourse of consent itself. Are there ways to respond to these objections within a consent-based framework? Let’s explore some of the possible responses to liberal consent rhetoric.

***Decision-making should be weighted to prioritize the most affected.*** According to this principle, the greater the impact a decision will have on a person, the more leverage he or she should have in the decision-making process. For instance, the opinions of a poor neighborhood’s long-term residents should count for more than those of developers or wealthier newcomers when determining whether to build new condominiums.

Bearing this in mind, how consensual an action is depends not on whether every citizen, equal under the law, would check yes or no about it on a ballot; rather, individuals’ feelings are weighted proportionally according to how the consequences will impact them. This reframing sidesteps some of the problems of negotiating political consent across power differentials. However, it preserves the notion that our interests coincide enough to be forged into a consensus, even if the consent of some is more equal than others. It’s doubtful that this could be possible in the most utopian future; it certainly is not today.

Wishing to legitimize our efforts according to this logic, anarchists sometimes use the example of a few individuals who support an action to stand in for an entire imagined demographic. We ascribe a mythical authenticity to specific local, working-class, indigenous, or other people who express enthusiasm for our activities, implicitly writing off those who don’t. We make such supporters into a sort of prosthesis for ourselves that entitles us to act against the ostensible

This is the risk of embracing a framework of political consent. Within this logic, the most moderate elements of any group or coalition will dominate by virtue of their alignment with consensus reality. What’s OK for anybody is based on what’s OK for everybody, which makes our strategies for changing this world look suspiciously similar to the world we’re trying to change. If we do in fact desire a radical break with what exists, let’s not trap ourselves in a framework aligned with the systems we want to destroy.

Nonviolence is the only ideology that can comprehensively protect consensus reality against the antagonism of all who would transform it. By preemptively condemning anything that exceeds the parameters of civil discourse, it ensures that any resistance will ultimately strengthen the underlying framework of authority, and even passes responsibility for policing on to the loyal opposition. Liberal complicity with violent systems of control can be “nonviolent” according to this logic, because they accept the boundaries of legitimacy decreed by consensus reality. Just as every pacifist condemns armed struggle and insurrection against the state, the gains of every “nonviolent” movement and revolution they cite, from Dr. King to Gandhi, rested on a foundation of explicit or threatened state violence. We shake our heads at liberal reluctance to acknowledge that the state is fundamentally rather than incidentally violent, but that violence is woven so seamlessly into consensus reality that it simply doesn’t register.

The violence so anxiously opposed by liberals is, by definition, that which ruptures consensus reality. And this is precisely why we consider that violence *necessary*: framing resistance as registering our “dissent” does not attack consensus reality but merely identifies our position within it. There are not opposing partisans *within* consensus reality—Republicans and Democrats, activists and reactionaries—but only partisans of consensus reality and partisans *against* it.

In short, the liberal notion of consent is a barrier to revolution. By definition, breaking consensus reality cannot be consensual. We have to move beyond political consent discourse to imagine liberating strategies for transforming reality.

14.

majority, imagining our chosen comrades to represent the most affected. Every anarchist has a preferred imaginary friend, whether the workers favored by IWW organizers, the West Virginia locals courted by opponents of mountaintop removal, or the extras in hip hop videos that insurrectionists hope will join them in the streets.

This is not only tokenizing, but dangerous, as it can lead us to overestimate popular support for our actions. Yet it is supported by a variety of rationalizations: just because we don't see public support doesn't mean it isn't there; the people who are most marginalized—who, we assume, are most likely to support our unpopular actions—are the least free to express that support publicly; and so on. There is some truth in these arguments. But when we gamble on this imaginary-friend fantasy as an effort to weigh by proxy the consent of the unrepresented—now represented by our presumed affinity with them—we're just deluding ourselves.

**Decision-making must be broadened to include all the people impacted.** Often, many of those who will be impacted by supposedly consensual decisions do not have appropriate leverage on them. For instance, the university's board of governors can decide by consensus to raise tuition, but what kind of consensus is that without the participation of the students who'll be paying it? If decisions included all stakeholders and elites couldn't impose them by force, wouldn't there be hope for a politics of consent?

Unfortunately, this framework is more useful for preventing actions or challenging their validity after the fact than for initiating them. The impacts of our actions ripple out far beyond our ability to trace them or the range of lives they will touch. We cannot even hope to be aware of every person who would be impacted by a decision, much less solicit meaningful input from each of them to confirm or deny consensus. In practical terms, expanding the participation in decision-making to everyone affected would either require resorting to majority-rule democracy—not a consent-based framework—or accepting the impossibility of ever making decisions.

Here we have to unflinchingly confront the reality that broad consensus on many issues will never exist. We might be able to agree about what to cook for dinner, but on the real questions about how to organize society and distribute resources, no consensus is possible today. In a class society stratified by white supremacy and patriarchy, our interests are fundamentally in conflict. Certainly we share many interests in common, and we can imagine worlds in which people weren't pitted against one another in contests for status and survival. But we will not be able to desert this world by consensus.<sup>3</sup>

**We're acting in self-defense.** As this reasoning goes, the operation of oppressive institutions constitutes an attack on us, and we don't need the consent of our attackers to defend ourselves. This harm isn't always on a literal, direct, individual level, as in *that specific Starbucks window makes my individual life increasingly precarious and impossible*. In a hopelessly complex global economy that masks the root causes of the harm it creates, nearly any attempt to launch a defensive counterattack will seem either symbolic or misdirected. Still, in this sense, direct action can be framed as defending ourselves against violations of our consent by state and capital.

But the rhetoric of direct action as self-defense doesn't offer us much guidance for how to move forward. In this model, state and capital are the protagonists, and the various formulations of *we* that we self-defend the mere objects of their actions. We can only react, not strategize new initiatives. Furthermore, the framework of self-defense is based in the terms of liberal individualism, with our private personal rights beginning where those of another end. What is it that we're defending? Our role in society as defined under capitalism and patriarchy? Our rights as dictated by the democratic state? To get free, we should be fighting to *destroy* our selves! Not our bodies and lives, but the selves that are constituted under state and capital.

If selfhood extends as far as the bank windows, if our selves overlap so extensively, we need another framework—we're not just defending *ourselves*. At best, self-defense is a justification, not a praxis; at

we know; we're terrified of the unknown.

fears, bound within their specific references, our terror goes beyond the limit of even our imaginations.

we became stronger in ourselves.

moved beyond ourselves into something entirely different.

needed to find a way out of this world. But confined within our desires and our fears, we could see no escape.

feeling terror and following it did we uncover the pathways to other worlds.

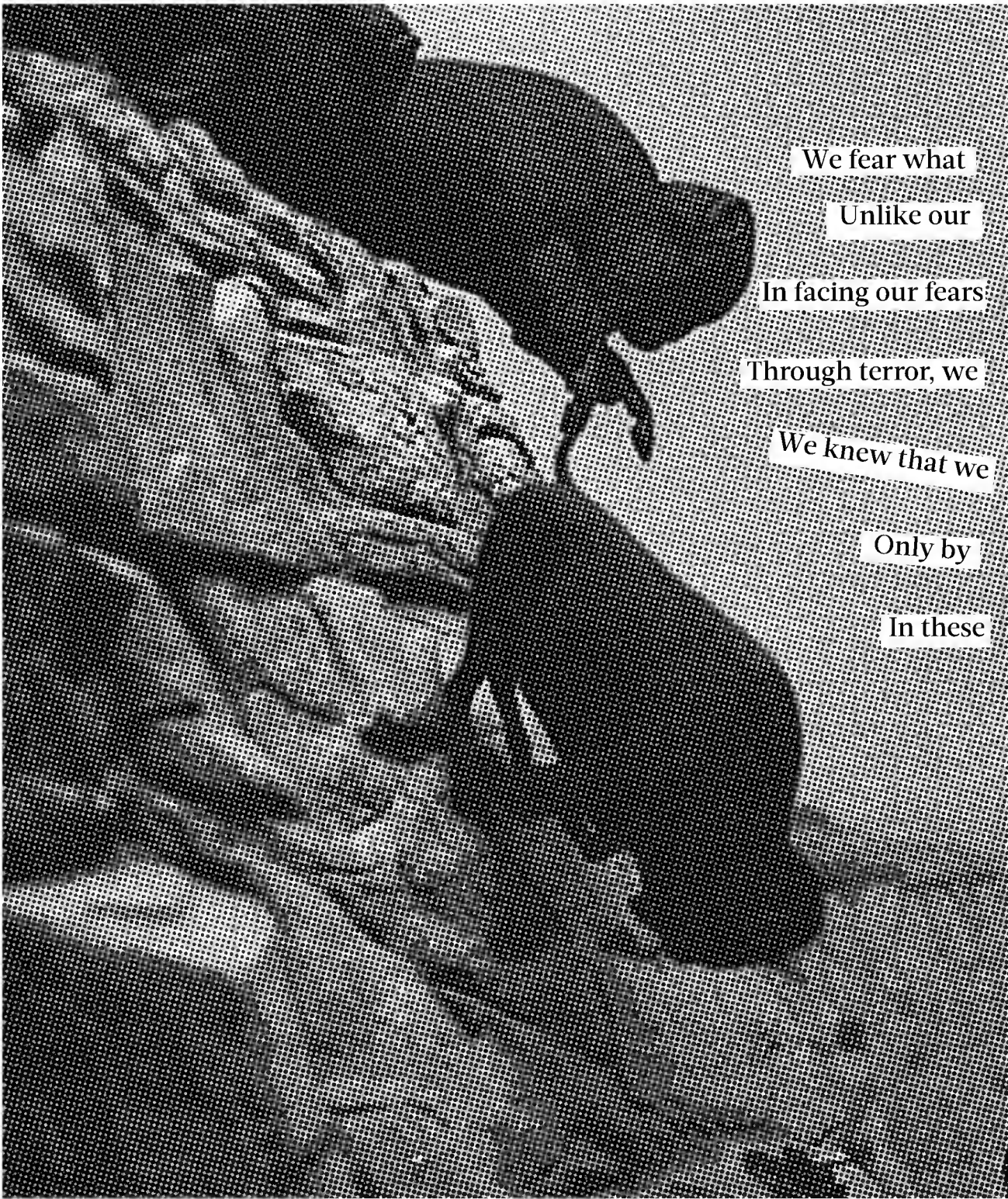
moments, we became anarchists.

Beyond our familiar desires and identities, past the limits of civil discourse and consensus reality, on the furthest edge of the map of what we know, there is a cliff.

Do we dare?

We begin our exploration of terror by examining its relative, the most provocative word in our political vocabulary...





We fear what

Unlike our

In facing our fears

Through terror, we

We knew that we

Only by

In these

15.

worst, it's a disingenuous smokescreen that leaves us without a framework to evaluate our effectiveness.

**Consent has to be informed.** In all consent-based ethical systems—medical, sexual, and otherwise—authentic consent requires full knowledge of the implications of a decision. On the political level, this criticism goes, if we all had access to complete information, we would make decisions differently. This is the basic hypothesis of liberalism: that the best of all possible worlds will result when people have access to all relevant information and the means to discuss it openly in order to make rational decisions.

The fatal flaw in this reasoning is that it fails to take power dynamics into account. When access to money and property determines our ability to act, under the rule of a state that reserves the sole right to employ violence, knowledge is not in fact power. Furthermore, it seems to demand a politics of total transparency, which would either preclude illegal activity or consign us all to the certainty of prison. An informed consent framework neither enables us to imagine how to achieve a consensus for anarchist revolution nor suffices to determine how much information to share with whom about the actions we take to fight for it.

In concluding that the consent framework can't accommodate our political needs, we're not endorsing the violation of consent, nor throwing consent out as a priority. Rather, the consent framework has not been sufficient to transcend the self-defeating dichotomy between either respecting consent to such an extent that we can't overthrow capitalism or disregarding it entirely. The point is to come up with a framework that solves those problems, not to throw out what gains we've made already.

In fact, our basis for fighting capitalism and hierarchy goes far beyond the claim that these systems operate without our consent. Ultimately, we fight for new worlds out of *desire*, and in order to move beyond the limitations of political consent discourse we have to look more closely at what desire is.

**3.**

One of the implications of this analysis is that we must unflinchingly recognize conflict as a reality. The vision we're putting forward aims not *just* to create a world in which all is consensual. We strive to prioritize each other's consent as much as possible, while recognizing that sometimes we really are in conflict, and we have to acknowledge conflicts rather than sweeping them under the rug of an imposed consensus. Our ideal is not a world without conflict, but a world in which conflicts don't produce hierarchies and oppression. We envision associations that can come together and break apart according to our desires; unlike the state, these would require no imposed consensus.

# DESIRE, CONSENT, AND POLITICS: A PRELUDE TO SEDUCTION

What is desire? Let's conceive of desires not as internal elements emanating from within individuals, but as autonomous forces that flow through them. Individuals don't desire things; whole societies produce and circulate desires, even if those desires remain submerged in most people. The fundamental unit of our analysis is not the individual human being, but the desire, with humans as the medium.

How can we conceive of desire and selfhood as they relate to consent and political action? The existing consent discourse presupposes static notions of self and desire. It presumes that desire is monolithic, composed of a single thrust rather than multiple pulls in different directions. When we have multiple desires, the desire that garners the plurality in our internal electoral process is assumed to be the only one that counts. Consent discourse presumes that what we want is knowable and can be articulated within the framework of our shared reality.

In reality, the desires we experience are not fixed or unitary. They shift constantly based on our experiences and contexts. They are multiple, contradictory, and divergent, surprising us with their diversity, frustrating us with their mutability. They resist our attempts to confine or domesticate them. They simply can't fit into a two-dimensional binary model of consent, wherein we either want something or we don't. This realization is terrifying, but it opens up new ways of understanding the anarchist project in relation to the consensus reality arrayed against us.

The nature of *desire* is complex and centrifugal, in contrast to the simplifying and centripetal nature of *interests*. The traditional approach of the left is for organizers to assist constituencies in winning victories that build power, which will presumably be deployed towards increasingly radical ends. The goals of these victories are generally framed in

terms of the *interests* of the constituency, not their *desires*. This is a clever trick: as interests appear to be an objective rather than subjective matter, it is easier for an outside managerial class to get away with defining and representing them. Interests can be framed as unitary, coherent, and integrative, whereas desires are multiple, inchoate, contradictory. Identity groups share interests; friends and lovers share desires. Interests are composed of calcified blocks of desire standardized to make sense within consensus reality.

Not only is desire far more complex and unstable than our discourses allow, it's also shaped by the conditions of our misery and exploitation. Even amid contradictions and chaos, the range of what it is possible to desire rarely escapes the confines of consensus reality. Who really imagines that in a free world, we'd dream of ergonomic chairs for our cubicles, more TV channels and brands of detergent, longer chains and softer cages? This is not to demean the struggles of those who fight for better conditions within this system. It's just to say that we would be paltry revolutionaries indeed if we based our programs merely on the consensus desires of groups whose allies we want to be.

The task of the revolutionary is not the task of the ally. We are not here to make the dreams of the proletariat come true. The proletariat is produced by capitalism, which we want to destroy. The task of the revolutionary is to shift our collective sense of the possible, so that our desires and the realities they drive us to create can shift in turn. We are here to transform reality beyond where our notions of consent can lead us. We need a different discourse to imagine the transformations that can open pathways out of

## III. TERROR INCOGNITA

# They sound like a hopeless place



consensus reality.

Sociologists studying prison life speak of "situational homosexuality," explaining previously heterosexual prisoners' homosexual behavior in terms of the conditions of their confinement in a single-sex environment. But isn't all homosexuality, and indeed all hetero- and bi- and other-sexuality, "situational" in the sense of being influenced by the context in which it occurs? Our sexual desires are shaped by the demographics of the places we inhabit, by our early experiences of longing and experimentation, and by the media and education we're exposed to, among innumerable other "situational" influences. Sociologists see prisoners who have same-sex sex in prison and then return to cross-sex relationships upon release as being "really" straight and only "situationally" queer. Who knows what patterns of desire and sexual expression would emerge if the omnipresent context of hetero-patriarchy, enforced through every carrot and stick known to us, were transformed?

Many people experience their "sexual orientation" as unalterably fixed. Probably we all experience a mixture of seemingly intrinsic inclinations that frame a certain range of possibility and pleasure within which we make choices. But the queer project is not to carve out a space within capitalist hetero-patriarchy where those with unbearably persistent inclinations towards same-sex sexuality can endure them in relative peace. The queer project is to **obliterate capitalism and hetero-patriarchy** so new forms of desire can emerge. In prison society, our desire, homosexual or not, will always be "situational," constrained by countless limits. Let's destroy these constraints, opening the way for desires more powerful and terrible than we can imagine.



18.

## INTRODUCING SEDUCTION

There's another discourse we could try out here, a framework that seems to be implied by our current practice whether or not we acknowledge it. That framework is *seduction*.

What is seduction? It's a rather unsavory concept, bringing to mind manipulative attempts to induce others to let themselves to be used for one's own ends. In a sexual context, it can imply either a romantic, charismatic, persuasive use of charm to propose a sexual encounter, or a way to trick someone into succumbing to one's advances. The connotations are discomfiting, but the salient factor is the implication that the seducer creates a desire, rather than simply unearthing it. It is this sense that we find most interesting in considering the problems of desire and consensus reality on the political level.

When we *seduce*, we present someone who ostensibly doesn't want something with a new situation in which they may want it after all. Whereas consent focuses on obtaining the go-ahead for an external action—"Is this OK?"—seduction focuses internally, on desire: "Could you *want* this?" Our practices of seduction don't aim to induce others to do things they don't want to do, but to induce others to *want to* do them, in the most meaningful sense: to want to take on all the risks and pleasures they entail.

Again, we don't believe that we can persuade everyone to consent to anarchist revolution; not only is the deck stacked against us, but the dealer, the table, and the whole house. We don't buy into the idea that our goals are what everybody "really" wants, nor do we assume that everyone would adopt our views if only they had access to all the right information. We don't claim to represent anyone beyond ourselves, nor to stand in for any silent majority; in this sense, anarchist revolution is not a *democratic* project. Nor do we, despairing of those things, decide that to be true to our principles we must give up on anarchist revolution altogether and retreat into isolation among the few comrades with whom we can establish meaningful self-determined consensus. We don't think it's hopeless to resist in the face of the stranglehold of consensus reality. We want a different path forward, one that doesn't assume desire to be fixed, that doesn't rely on liberal consent.

We neither wish to impose our will on others by force, nor to disregard their desires. Instead, we want to perform a kind of dark magic, an alchemical operation. We want to *induce* desires, not simply *fulfill* them.<sup>4</sup>

Recall the militants of the Gay Liberation Front in the 1970s. They had little interest in securing rights as an interest group within civil society, but rather considered themselves at war with the straight world. We can think of these sexual militants as partisans of different configurations or forms or flows of desire. Some GLFers considered their task to be unlocking the potential for same-sex love and sexual expression latent in every person; as the ones for whom this came more easily, through whatever accidents of nature or nurture, they formed a natural vanguard in the struggle for liberated sexuality. In that context, seducing the straight took on an explicitly political eroticism. Unbound by the frameworks of fixed identity and their baggage within civil society, anyone can become both subject and object of queer desire. Forget advocating for the "right" of gay people to exist gayly; let's infect straight society with contagious queer desire for love, sex, and liberation.

In that spirit, our prime advantage as anarchists lies not in the coherence and reason of our ideology, but in the passionate actions we undertake and the ungovernable lives we lead. Let's not try to convert people to anarchism; let's set out, with mischievous glee, to infect everyone around us with the anarchy that flows in our veins. Let's produce situations in which anarchy is possible—even likely—even *desirable* to those who might not feel any inclination towards it today. Of course, this is a violation of liberal consent: the right to be left alone to one's desires as they have been produced by the domination of state and capital. But in our strange cruel love for our friends and neighbors, we cannot abandon them to the mediocrity of consensus reality. How can we sleep at night, knowing that their heads resound with capital's bleak dreams?

How did you become an anarchist? Did you emerge from the womb in a black hoodie? Did you "always know" you were going to crave riots, stale bagels, and photocopy

FORGET  
QUEER  
SAFE  
SPACES  
LETS GET  
*terrified*

about making more

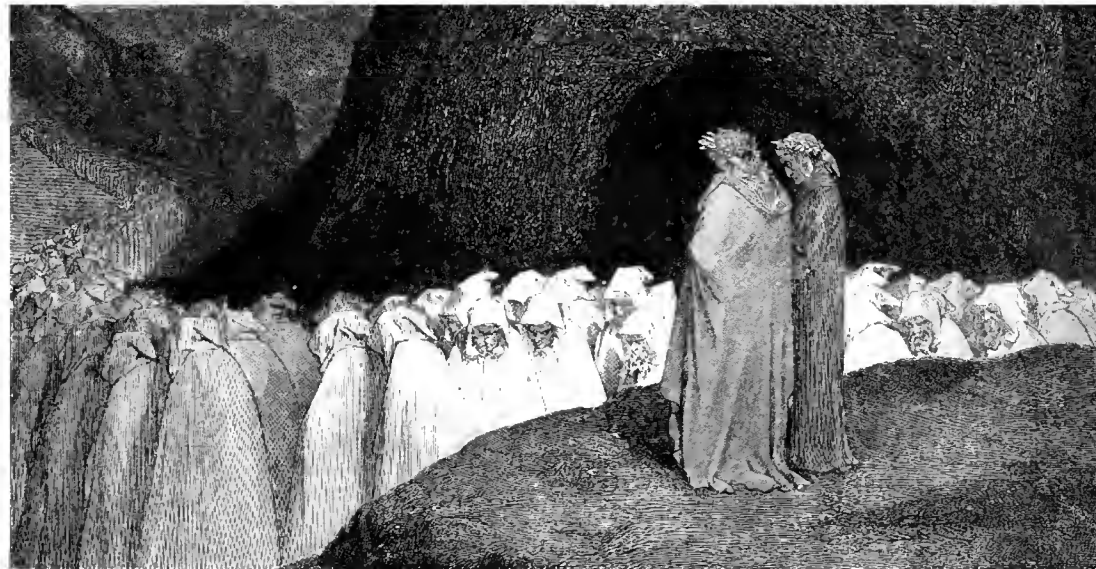
street; we use our charisma to generate a sense of mystery and excitement about our marginality, hinting that one's private alienation may resonate with a community of other Others. As queer cruisers, we flick glances at strangers strolling down the street, turn our heads and make eye contact again, stop to gaze in a shop window to see the other doing the same, then amble back to nod hello and arrange terms. Subtle cues, code words, key entry points; we unlock gates to hidden knowledges and perverse practices. We seduce with subtlety, visible to those who need to find us, but clever enough to stay hidden from our enemies and the clueless mainstreams.

In all of this, there is risk. We must understand what HIV/AIDS activists say about sex: there is no safety. There are practices that minimize risk, but there is no utopia where we can be sure we are out of harm's way. Having queer sex subjects one to greater risk: mental distress, rejection from family and religious institutions, health consequences, homophobic violence. Likewise, years of participation in anarchist struggle have left us with FBI files, imprisoned and injured friends, empty bank accounts and rotten teeth, post-traumatic stress and broken

hearts. At times, we blame our lovers and comrades for subjecting us to these risks, rather than fighting the oppressive institutions that force them upon us.

We have a world to win, but we have much more to lose than our chains: we have to lose our sense of safety, our taste for security, our comfortable illusions, our untroubled sleep, our physical health, even our lives. To be queer is to embrace the pleasures of perversity in spite of its dangers, to assert that its risks are worth taking. And perhaps this gets at the heart of what it means for us to be anarchists.

Queerness is *unsafety*. The push towards security is the push to annihilate queerness. "Safety" depends on reducing risk through predictability, stability, conformity to norms: all the things queerness rejects. The project of the security state is to annihilate peripheries that do not submit properly to the exploitation of the center. A "safe space" is a temporary zone of stability in which our identities and the apparatuses that produce them can operate without disruption. Whether we're talking about penetrating our bodies or penetrating the body politic, we lose safety, we face risk—and we affirm that this risk makes our lives worth living.



## 4.

Wait, there's nothing liberating about attempting to induce desires in others. That's the function of the advertising industry, the lever of demand that has driven capitalism over the past century. Democracy purports to be a marketplace of ideas where we can all talk about what we want and then decide; different configurations of desire are constantly at war. Ad firms don't just create specific desires, they enforce a mode of desiring that can be routed through the consumer economy. Propaganda, subliminal messaging, induced addiction, outright violence: these comprise a brutal arsenal aimed at us every moment of the day. Around the globe, the military clears the path for neoliberal pillaging, while NGOs get into the business of inducing people to want to be successful at generating currencies that can be exchanged on the global market. Ought we not be suspicious of a project framed in such transparently manipulative terms?

As grim as it looks, this vista reveals that if we are not partisans of certain modes of desiring, we will remain objects rather than subjects within these desiring wars. We cannot retreat into essentialist notions of unearthing our "true" desires from some internal vault, nor a pseudo-Buddhist project of extinguishing desire on an individual level while the world burns. What sets us apart is that we strive to create a world in which every person can realize her unique potential on her own terms, rather than simply pushing for this or that option within the current conditions.

scams? If so, congratulations, but it seems that most of us had some sort of experience that opened us to a sense of possibility we hadn't seen before. For me, it happened at age 18 when I heard a vague rumor that I should show up to a Godspeed, You Black Emperor! show. I did, and when it ended, lo and behold, a group of maniacs appeared with drums and banners, and before I knew it I'd joined 200 others marching in the street, permits be damned. We were unstoppable. The blood boiled in my veins and I howled ecstatically until I lost my voice. Things were never the same again.

Now, I'd participated in polite permitted marches before. If you'd asked me if I desired to go on a feisty unpermitted midnight march, I probably would have thought it sounded cool. But I didn't actively desire it beforehand; if I'd been forthrightly invited, I might have declined out of anxiousness or indifference. The desire was generated by the context, the mystery, and by the experience itself. Likewise with the Christmas boot: ask me if I want to lick a boot, and I'll laugh, screw up my face, and say, "Eww!" But put me on the kitchen floor in that specific moment and context, and I'll beg to give you my last dollar for the privilege. I suspect that with both the march and the boot, the key was that it was unexpected and illicit, that it went against my instincts: these were the reasons it left such an indelible imprint, opening some door of desire in me that couldn't be shut. Had someone asked me in advance whether I would consent to participate, that might have undermined the very sense of liberation I experienced.

Trust me, I'm as uncomfortable with the implications of this as you are. But we need to look honestly at the transformative experiences that opened the door for us into anarchism and think about how we can construct and open those types of doors for others. If we're not going to be a vanguard and we're not going to convince everyone to join us through rational discourse and tabling the right 'zines in the marketplace of ideas, this might be all we've got to work with.

# TRANSFORMATION, INVITATION, AND CONTAGION

How does seduction work? We hypothesize that seduction unfolds via three processes: *transformation*, *invitation*, and *contagion*. We *transform* circumstances, creating space for new possibilities and thus new desires to flourish; we *invite* others to participate in these new situations, to experiment with different modes of action and desire; and we *infect* others with curiosity, an insatiable desire for freedom, and the means to experiment towards it.

We strive for *transformation* because if we desire on the basis of what we know, we can only induce new desires that exceed the confines of our current reality by shifting the conditions in which we live. Sometimes it can be as simple as doing things in the street without permits, or using a park or building for an entirely new purpose. Disobedience is crucial to transformation; nothing opens up a sense of possibility like literally breaking the rules. But our behavior is constrained by far more than traffic laws and zoning regulations; social norms, gender roles, and innumerable other systems shape how we act, and each way we're constrained provides new terrain for transformation. The key lies in challenging what's taken for granted in a way that opens up the possibility to act differently, and to imagine how the world would be different if those rules and borders were no longer fixed.

*Invitation* requires neither persuasion via rational discourse nor imposition by force. Here we maintain the spirit of consent discourse, asserting our respect for the wishes of others and opposition to coercion. We aspire to a world based on voluntary association, in which participation is based on our own free choice rather than force or manipulation, and thus we aim to prefigure that world through our methods of creative resistance.

This can take many forms: leaving the doors open in the occupied building, modeling mutual aid at public Really Really Free Markets, offering black bandanas and cans of paint as the march leaves the show. Of course, we can't literally invite others to participate in

many actions beforehand, either because they have to be organized clandestinely or because we honestly don't know what will happen. But we can shape our actions to maximize the agency of potential participants.

Seduction casts the invitee as the protagonist, the one whose agency counts—in contrast to consent discourse, which merely seeks *permission*. The whole point is for people to discover new desires, to want to do something they didn't want before; they have to be in the driver's seat for that to be possible. In this sense, *anarchist* seduction means the opposite of its traditional negative connotation of trying to get something from people against their will or at their expense.

Finally, we aspire to invite others into practices that will prove contagious: ideas that self-replicate, models that can be applied in a variety of circumstances, attitudes that prove infectious. *Contagion* ensures that rebellion isn't restricted to activists, scenesters, or any other particular group. Only when revolt spreads so widely that it can no longer be quarantined to a specific demographic will anarchy move permanently beyond the anarchists. We succeed when others emerge from the spaces we create feeling more powerful. We win when the ruptures of possibility we open prove impossible to close.

## WHEN SEDUCTION FAILS

Unfortunately, our actions don't always achieve these goals. Sometimes we try to cast spells of transformation and they fail.

One way our efforts can go awry is when they position the organizing cabal as the protagonists rather than the invitees we hope to seduce into participation. In these cases, our actions don't spread, but remain the province of a distinct group. For partisans of transformation, what counts is the circulation and contagion of subversive ideas and practices, not the power of a specific social body—be it anarchists or the Party. Rather than talking about how *we're* going to fuck shit up, it would be more audacious to claim, “We are going to cast a spell in which every good citizen finds a hammer in her hand, a bank window before her, and the will to mayhem.” If our spells are not infectious, we are at best an interesting vanguard.

the inexorable future of stable identity. When desire is conceptualized as a fixed quantity that can be unknown to its possessor, even in conflict with his or her will, consent passes out of our hands. The mere fact of having had queer sex becomes post facto evidence of its being consensual, since one's words can be suspect due to homophobic conditioning. And if the subject fails to advance to the stage of stable gay identity, then the sex was merely an aberration, a step towards realizing the fixed truth of one's heterosexuality, which was there “all along.”

A competing queer narrative contends that desire is neither fixed nor stable, rejecting the linear developmental model and its neat fixed outcomes. Here, the queer seducer does not play a *definitive* role but rather a *contextual* one, offering an option for pleasures that connote nothing more about those who pursue them than what desires flow through them in a given moment. Consent becomes more significant when the unpredictable lurches of our hearts and loins mean more than simply acting out a pre-written script of sexual truth. Here, a certain politics of seduction reveals itself as even more radically consent-oriented than the standard consent discourse: it recasts our agency as not simply saying yes or no to options within the identity-bound palette of desires, but rather opening new vistas of possible desire.

“We recruit,” proclaims the pink bloc banner, acknowledging that our potential lies not in speaking sexual truth to power, but in disrupting sexual truth via seduction. Queer seduction is a threat because it offers possibilities—sexual, material, relational, and otherwise—not just as candidates in our elections of desire, but as forces undermining the stability of the entire electoral system.

How do we recruit for our black blocs, and how does that rate as seduction? Let's think of how seduction into queer sex and culture intertwines with the entryways we offer into anarchism. The queer seducer offers a way to make sense of one's marginality, whether it is experienced internally or imposed externally, inviting one into a community of exclusion. As anarchists, we table at book fairs, we hand out bandannas after punk shows as marches take to the

As anarchists, we grapple with a constant tension between expansion and contraction, attraction and repulsion: our power resides in our critical distance, standing apart as a negative force, yet if we don't connect with others we consign ourselves to irrelevance and repression.

Queer seduction, then, treads a difficult line. It must remain rooted in the periphery while also avoiding any fixed position within an identity framework. Queer must negate, yet it must resist the inclusive pseudo-negative project of the black flag rainbow coalition. It must be a disintegrative force, internally and externally, constantly undermining itself. The line of flight must evaporate every time, preventing any coherence from crystallizing to offset the threat of reterritorialization. Perhaps the failure of queer discourse to produce any coherence is the root of its seductiveness. Its combination of in-group exclusivity and unpoliceable borders gives it a mysterious yet accessible allure.

Anarchists can learn from this. We have to keep our distance from all mainstreams, yet the project of transforming society must spread outward. How do we maintain that feisty, self-righteous marginality while finding affinities outside of our tiny slice of the periphery?

## HOW WE SEDUCE

What can all this teach us about desire as it figures in consent and seduction? One notion of sexual identity holds that queer people fit a predictable development arc, ultimately uncovering timeless truths about their sexual desires beneath the shifting sands of homophobic socialization. Eventually they declare and enact those truths—“coming out”—and enter into community with others who have progressed through these stages.

In this narrative, the role of the queer seducer is limited; he or she presents the opportunity to fulfill a pre-existing yet submerged desire, revealing an underlying sexual truth as the subject moves towards



Both quotations are from the *Queer Ultraviolence Bash Back! Anthology*, published by Ardent Press.

## THE FAILURE OF QUEER SEDUCTION, & the Seduction of Queer Failure

Of course a queer black bloc is an unsafe space. But it's not just an unsafe space for queers—and perhaps *that's* what makes it queer. Is queer insurrection the project of extending unsafety outwards from the sexually marginal to all? Seducing the straight into danger? How does this relate to consent?

Queer discourse presents a test case of the politics of seduction in a way that blurs the lines of the metaphorical and the literal. It explicitly capitalizes on the erotic power of the political in ways that are usually left latent. It deploys the aesthetics of sexual desire to induce us into illicit political practices. It's a project of extending that risk outwards, infecting those whose merely sexual aptitudes might be recuperable, or whose rioting might not threaten their own cushioned normativity. In some ways, it's a modification of the original Gay Liberation Front vision of homosexualizing the world by unlocking the potential for gay love in everyone, reappearing on the political level. It works through seducing others into deviant militant acts, in such a manner that the sexual nature of that seduction need not be purely rhetorical or latent. A politics of seduction offers a framework for queer events to produce insurgent social bodies—yet one fraught with the risk that other queers will be angry you've invited outsiders into their home.

Here's a queer contradiction: we're utterly uninterested in conforming to the norms of others, but we want to seduce them. Embracing marginality ensures that we avoid assimilation into any center, while our insistence on fluidity implies the radical possibility that you, or anyone, could be us. Yet that possibility can undermine whatever radical potential exists in positioning queer as *counterpower*, as the queer tent expands wide enough to encompass people whose marginality is more metaphysical than concrete. Deploying queer in ways less demonstrably linked to exclusion robs the position of its anti-normative force.

Sometimes when our seductions fail, those we've attempted to invite feel used rather than seduced. Over the years, this has proved one of the primary causes of the unpopularity of unilateral militant activity. It's flattering to be offered a role as a protagonist in an exciting story, but it isn't so nice to feel that others are trying to take advantage of you. In the debrief conversation after the Mayday debacle described above, when so many people spoke with frustration about the lack of consent implicit in how the action went down, we must understand that as a failure of seduction. When they speak of consent, they're describing their reaction to the *actions* that took place; our analysis of seduction treats the *desires* underlying these as the center of gravity.

Perhaps we can best understand such conflicts by reframing them: they are not merely contests between people with different desires, but contests between different desires playing out between people as well as within individuals. The failure of an unpopular anarchist action doesn't stem from the fact that it failed to *meet* the desires of participants or bystanders. Rather, the action failed to *enable* subversive desires to arise or flow into new hosts. Participants in the Mayday debriefing weren't necessarily opposed to rioting; they simply didn't feel as though they'd had the chance to become protagonists in their own stories of rebellion.

## INTO THE UNKNOWN

What are anarchists good for? We don't see ourselves as the revolutionary subject, nor its vanguard or representative. But that doesn't mean we're irrelevant to the struggles and upheavals around us. We up the ante and rep the anti; we call bluffs and take dares; we unearth lines of flight out of consensus reality. We take risks to induce others to share them with us; we take care of each other so we can be dangerous together.

Ultimately, the politics of seduction don't rely on rational argumentation to influence people. These are passionist politics: we dive headlong into the terrifying fires of transformation, allowing strange passions to seize us. It's not that these desires are “ours”; rather, we are theirs. We become lightning rods that crackle with flows of charged desire.

Let's not forget the importance of seducing *ourselves* with our actions. It's frighteningly easy for anarchist activity to ossify into dreary, repetitive routines. Actions that don't emerge out of our own desires are unlikely to seduce us or anyone else. Sure, some kids will be radicalized by the Food Not Bombs run by four burnt-out punks who resent every Sunday they spend in the kitchen. But we forge our deepest relationships of struggle in collectively experiencing the new, the exciting, the terrifying. It's not just beautiful but strategic to live lives that push to the outermost edges of what's possible.

The stakes are high. From consent discourses, we retain the prioritization of caring for others and paying attention to their needs. We must never disregard the well-being of those we invite into zones of transformation; yet neither can we play it safe and allow consensus reality to dictate our range of possible dreams and actions. We cannot promise safety, but we can share in the danger of the unknown, in its pleasures and its risks.



# Coda:

## BACK TO CONSENT AND SEXUALITY

# SHARE IN THE PLEASURES AND DANGERS OF THE UNKNOWN

What does this imply in the realm of sexuality? Are we positing an artificial distinction between the political and the sexual?

Remember, our goal in acknowledging the limitations of consent discourse is not to discard it entirely but to determine where it can take us and where else we need to go. Consent provides crucial tools for us to treat each other with care in sexual interactions. At the same time, we can challenge simplistic notions of desire: it may be that some of our most deeply erotic moments did not occur when we finally achieved a desire fixed within us, but when we experienced unexpected and unprecedented forms of pleasure. Perhaps insights from our discourse of political seduction can offer perspective on our sexuality, but we maintain our allegiance to consent discourse in sex. Our critique of political consent discourse isn't abstract, but based on its *tactical* shortcomings, the limitations of what it allows us to do and imagine. By contrast, sexual consent discourse has proven its utility in our daily lives, inducing us to examine our desires and transform how we relate to each other erotically.

But what about the terrain on which the sexual and political join in glorious intercourse? We're speaking, of course, of the fascinatingly protean, mercurial, kaleidoscopic array of discourses, identities, and practices known as *queer*.

The abortive mini-riot in the Boystown gayborhood of Chicago during the 2009 Bash Back! convergence reflected those tensions to the fullest. Were the queers who dragged a newspaper box and trash can back onto the sidewalk liberal traitors whose lack of respect for diversity of tactics left marchers more vulnerable to police violence? Or were the queers who catalyzed the “spontaneous eruption of anger, joy, vengeance, and desire” responsible for the lack of planning and resulting clusterfuck? Were those who condemned the action afterwards myopic pacifists whose racist and tokenizing critiques stemmed from misguided notions of solidarity? Or did they point out valid problems with the “lack of coordination, consent, and effectiveness”?<sup>11</sup> It seems that in these instances, anarcho-queer seductions largely failed—for all these reasons, but also as the result of an unresolved tension about who is entitled to engage in queer discourse and tactical escalation.

This prompts us to ask what the relationship should be between our positioning and the lines of flight we seek. As those two batty French chaps put it, “It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight.” So what about people who have no meaningful relation to the LGBT strata? Here I mean those who were never lesbian or gay before becoming “radical queers,” who never desperately needed the things those communities offer, who never experienced assimilation as an intimate betrayal rather than an ideological impropriety. A critique of assimilation is a very different thing coming from within an LGBT community struggling with how to respond to normalizing trends than coming from anarchists who are not under comparable pressure to assimilate into mainstream society to maintain their community identity. It would be like a bunch of gay leather daddies, a few with floss-sewn patches on their vests, wrecking a Hot Topic for commodifying punk culture. Cool, I guess, but... really?

This begs many questions. Does it matter what kind of sex the participants in a “queer” event have and with whom? Does your position in the matrices of sexual power determine how “legitimate” it is for you to claim queer identity, participate in a queer event, or steer it in a certain direction? If queer just becomes a synonym for social war, is that OK, and who gets to decide? Does it matter that others who use the

term have dramatically different notions of what it means? Should anarchists deploy queer discourse towards our own riotous ends when it may have harmful consequences for others?

As the Puget Sound Anarchists announcement after QFQ 2011 acknowledged, “no actions are safe.” Yet we cannot ignore the “disappointment, frustration, and alienation” other queer folks expressed. This is a symptom of failed seduction, in which our would-be friends didn't feel invited, their range of possible desires wasn't transformed, and our tactics didn't prove infectious. For queers who are targeted by violence on a regular basis and see an anarchist-organized queer event as an opportunity for self-assertion rather than confrontation—a rare chance to experience public safety rather than to take crazy risks together—a queer street party may not be fertile ground for insurrectionary camaraderie to bloom. When a small vanguard of instigators uses a queer event as cover to attack and then disappear, leaving a confused and vulnerable crowd to deal with the consequences, this is a recipe for failed seduction indeed.

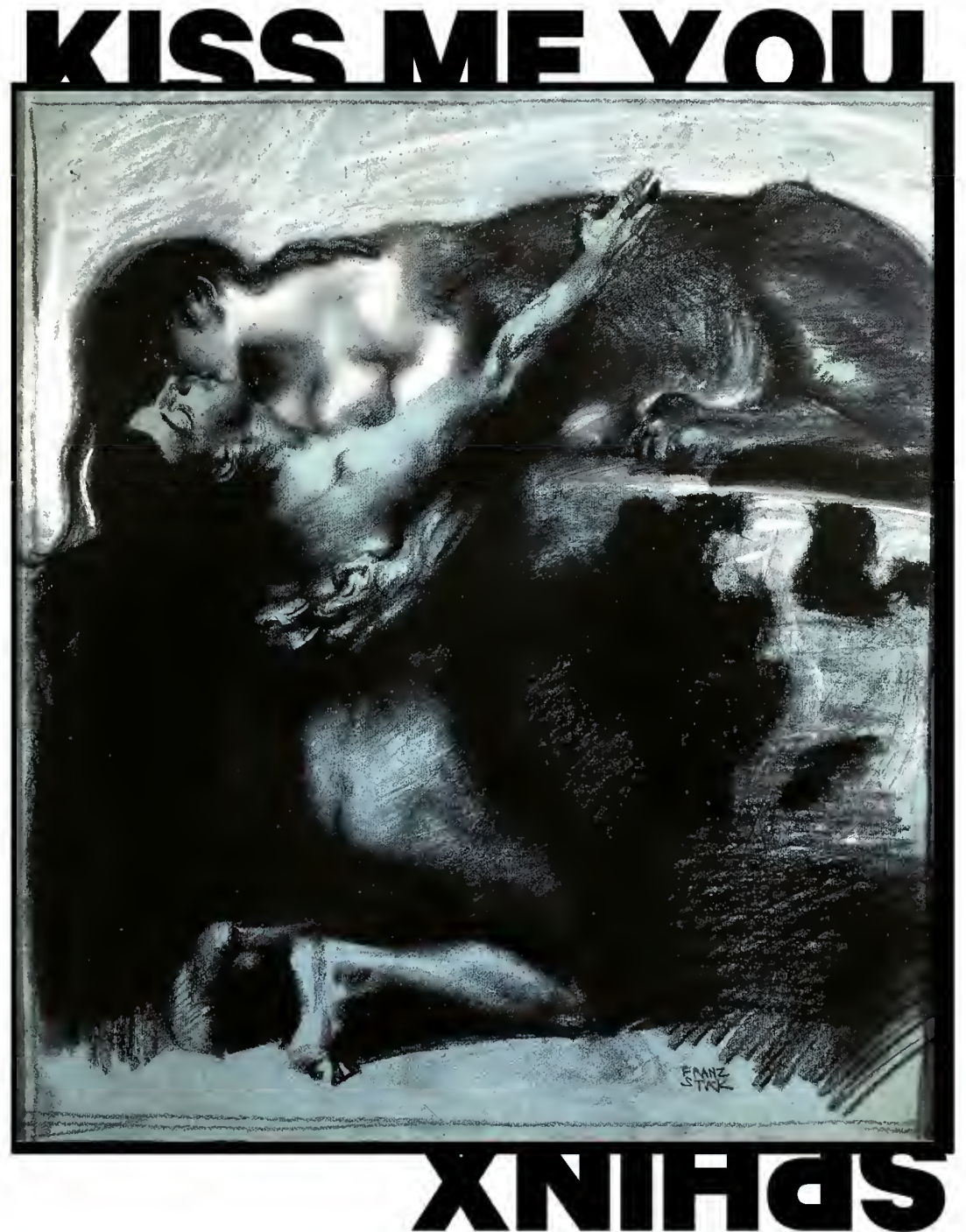
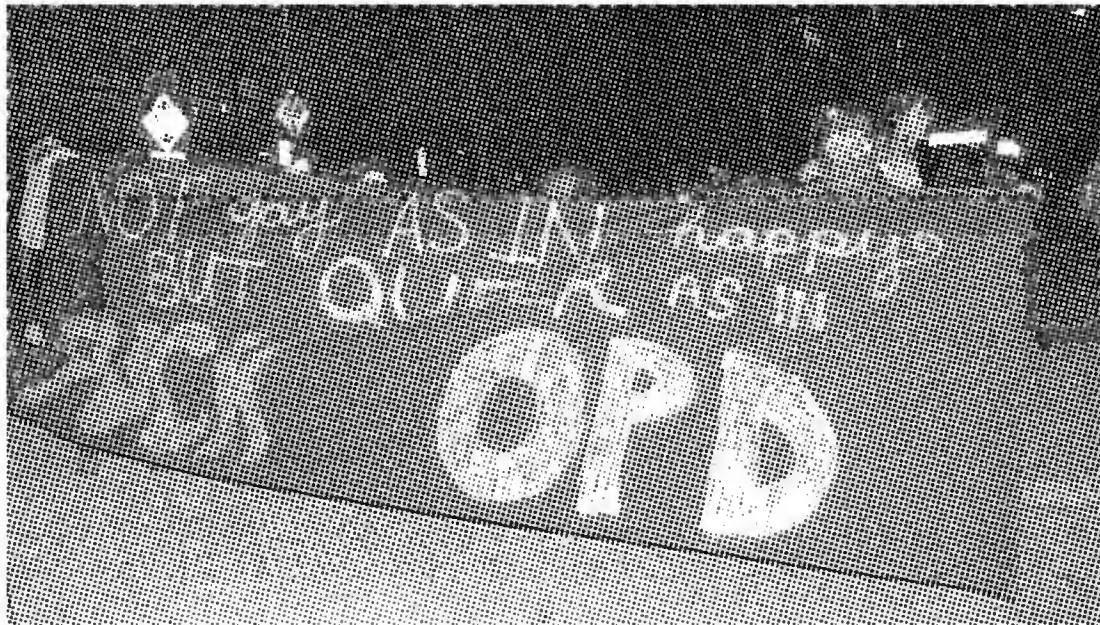
But does this mean we have to consign queer events to feel-good identity liberalism, tamed by fears and good intentions into sterile ally-ship and tactical monotony? No! Let us reject both the heterosexuality of the riot and the liberality of the queer dance party, and instead explore how the politics of seduction can offer tools for challenging each.



But if all the queer black bloc manages to do is to assist queer anarchists in achieving their desires, while that's a worthy goal, it remains within the confines of identity politics rather than a politics of seduction. A genuinely seductive project of queer insurrection would transform situations that seem to be fixed—such as a queer cabaret in a college auditorium, let's say—and crack them open to reveal unforeseen possibilities of desire. If the Bash Back! march induced people starting from the subject position of queer (regardless of politics) rather than that of anarchist (regardless of sexuality) into smashy desires, we count that as a success. But if nearly all the rioters came to the “march for queer liberation” in order to riot, rather than coming to a queer-themed event and finding themselves swept away in riotous currents of seductive desire, we simply provided an identity-specific, inclusive alternative to the standard black bloc—a “safe space” to get dangerous.

**In that sense, how is a queer black bloc different from Christian hardcore, a variation within a broader subculture where people rooted in two different scenes can bring them together comfortably? Is queer insurrection an *integrative* project? Have we just created a sort of monochrome rainbow coalition, a rainbow flag in every shade of black, and you don't even have to take it in the ass to join?**

Meanwhile, after Mayday 2010 in Asheville and the 2011 Queers Fucking Queers event in Seattle, some queers who participated in an essentially anarchist riot articulated that their desires hadn't been respected in the escalation. The evolution of a cultural notion of queer without explicit politics, leaving little tangible content beyond dance parties, has produced a situation in which many of those drawn to an anarcho-queer event don't necessarily share the desire to *smash back*.





to all without regard to actual practice or positioning, the sexual equivalent of “change we can believe in.”

In queer practice, however, perhaps a glimmer of potential remains. Unencumbered by the baggage of identity, queer insurrection declares war on the apparatuses of the state and hetero-patriarchy. Since these apparatuses form the basis of control, our attacks must focus on interrupting them, not merely responding to the provocations of homophobes. That is to say: disrupting public order and engaging the state in conflict confronts the roots of our oppression more directly than attempting to target specific affronts to our queer subjectivity. The latter can be an impetus for the former, a basis for coming together, but it should not remain an end in itself. Our goal is not to concretize the affinity, sexual or otherwise, that brings us together, but to keep it intentionally ephemeral so our attacks cannot be reterritorialized. That's queer as a *line of flight*: a temporary position assumed and then abandoned for the purposes of war.

That's what happened at the infamous Bash Back! march at the G20 in Pittsburgh. A queer impetus to riotous collectivity gathered a whole bunch of weirdos, an unknown proportion of whom might or might not have “identified as” queer. But the chant circulating as the bloc tore through the college district affirmed, “We're here! We're queer! We're anarchists! We'll fuck you up!” We could spend all night deconstructing the meaning of *queer* in that chant: we're marginal, abject, self-righteously excluded? We're all hot and bothered for property destruction? It doesn't matter. The point was: we came, we wrecked, we vanished. Queer was simply the mask we wore in common, and less likely than our black bandanas to come home reeking of pepper spray.

But what does the line of flight actually entail? What is the content of the temporary position assumed and then discarded? We didn't all wear pink bandanas. We didn't all have queer sex during or after the riot.<sup>10</sup> The Pittsburgh Bash Back! march was successful in getting anarchist militants together to make moderate destroy across lines of sexuality and gender. The action offered space for anarchists who were alienated from traditional heteromascuine expressions of the black bloc to get wild in a different atmosphere. It created a black bloc with a different aesthetic character than others before it, challenging the heterosexualization of the anarchist riot.

10.

To be fair, I did have queer sex afterwards. But I didn't hear reports of anyone who went to the riot having queer sex afterwards that they wouldn't have had otherwise. If this was not your experience, please fill us in, preferably with extensive detail, lurid prose, and full-color photographs.

Here we wade into the tumultuous waters of queer insurrection. Although queers (in the **A5** sense) have been dancing in the streets as long as there have been streets, we can trace the origin of this particular trajectory to the 2008 RNC protests in St. Paul, at which a Bash Back! contingent plugged into the Unconventional Action blockade strategy with a dance party at a downtown intersection. This trend, appearing from Bash Back! convergences to the Queers Fucking Queers marches and the 'zines *Towards the Queerest Insurrection* and *Pink and Black Attack*, aims to make queer a threat again. But which sense of “queer” is meant? It's clearly more expansive than the A1 sense: some insurrectionary queer texts make no reference to same-sex sex or love. Perhaps we can more accurately read the intended sense of queer as a *line of flight*.

What's that? Imagine any field of social relations as a matrix, like graph paper crisscrossed by parallel and perpendicular lines. The *state apparatus*—the whole range of coercive elements including police, prisons, surveillance, politicians, corporate media, and more—orders all the facets of social relations into a grid of control. Sexuality, for instance, is governed by norms indoctrinated by churches, media, and family, enforced by laws, police, and social norms. These systems form an invisible grid around us, ghostly prison bars shaping the contours of our reality. Just as road networks determine which paths we can take from place to place, this grid steers our actions into a narrow range of trajectories. Deleuze and Guattari call these constrained fields of social relations *striated space*.

The only way to resist striated space is to escape it, to create pathways that break from the standard tracks. These are lines of flight: continuing with the geometric metaphor, imagine diagonal lines shooting outward, escaping the logic of the grid. If we succeed in tracing a line of flight out of the striated space, we emerge into a plane of smooth space that isn't mapped in the grids of control: we have become *detrterritorialized*. However, the apparatuses are constantly shifting the grid, adding bars to our windows and paving roads over open fields. They incorporate and neutralize our line of flight until it becomes just another striated space. This process is called *reterritorialization*.

There was a time when mere homosexuality was understood as a specter menacing the state and the family. During the Cold War, capitalist production depended on forms of social reproduction that sexual deviance threatened. However, in the neoliberal era, social conformity is less important than a diversity of consumer niches; legitimizing gay identity as a target market has proved more profitable than mere repression. In tandem with these economic shifts, LGBT political movements have produced homo-nationalism, the pursuit of individual rights and state inclusion rather than collective liberation and anti-state revolution. On an international level, states deploy this ideology to advance imperialism: the Israeli tourism industry courts LGBT travelers to “pinkwash” apartheid in Palestine, while gay pundits cite homophobia in Iran to promote gay support for US military intervention. On local and national levels, homo-nationalism manifests in LGBT alliances with anti-immigration forces and gay and lesbian liaisons within urban police departments. All of these operations are intended to increase the investment of the dominant strata of a marginal population in the repressive forces that targeted them just a generation ago.

In the face of the recuperation of mere homosexuality, the emergence of “queer” identity, with its promises of fluidity and anti-normative deviance, seemed at first to offer a line of flight out of the striated space of sexual identity. But today, according a certain insurrectionist reading, queer identity has been fully reterritorialized, its potential exhausted and its power recuperated. According to this notion, any identity— any fixed position, any half of a binary established within current power relations—can only reinforce the sexual power matrix, never escape it. Coming together on the basis of our positioning in striated space frames our affinities in the terms set by the state apparatus, so that the best we can hope for is to adjust our place in society through civil discourse, winning “rights” and state-based concessions. Gay identity is the Democratic Party of sexuality. Queer identity is still trying to convince everyone to vote for Nader. But queer identity is also uniquely “democratic” in the sense that it is accessible

## II. W(H)ITHER QUEER?

# Suck Yeah Wreck Shit

Why should anarchists care about queer discourse? Isn't queer just a term for a small, if fashionable, subset of today's anarchists? Isn't it wrapped up in the baggage of identity politics?

On the contrary, not only has anarchist engagement with queer discourse expanded beyond any fixed position of sexual identity, it also reflects some of the most interesting tensions in current anarchist practice. It has become intertwined with insurrectionary action, reconceptualizations of feminism, and—most critically for us—the messy politics of seduction.

Whither queer? To what end this discourse? Why do we use it? Where do we locate it—in what bodies, experiences, tendencies, actions? And—*with*er queer? Should we let it rot, exposing its emptiness? Do we imagine it withering away when it has outlived its usefulness, like the state was supposed to do under communism? Or do we imagine the wasting common in AIDS patients, sunken cheeks and hollow eyes, queer bodies withering from the combination of a virus and the indifference of those whose fingers lie on both cures and triggers? Can we imagine queer practice as a virus that infects the body politic, a time bomb that destroys from within?

There are no real answers beneath the glitter. The question is not “What is it?” but “What does it enable us to *do*?”

## Pittsburgh, 2009

I don't bother to go to the big queer event; drag, performance, a talk in a college auditorium, whatever. I've been working doing trauma support in the convergence space all day, and I didn't come to Pittsburgh for that sort of silliness. But I show up afterwards, because they say shit's gonna go down. As I roll up I recognize friends: some queer, many not. But as we take off, it's sassy queers and trans folks who get us rolling. And we're rolling pretty deep; the entire city is thick with pigs, but the streets look clear. Where are they?

deviance to be sufficiently compelled to assemble and wreak havoc? Have we so de-eroticized the (heterosexual?) mass mobilization that we can't get it up for the IMF or the RNC anymore?

When the “queer dance party” shifts into a riot, is this also an attack on fixed queer identity? Should queers who are invested in queer identity experience this as a bashing? Should well-meaning straight anarchists participate in queer riots? Does doing so make them queer? Does refusing to do so keep them straight, or does it make them respectful allies? Will we look back on the years 2008 to 2011 as the bicultural phase of North American anarchist rioting? Does the emergence of the Occupy movement, which seems to mark a shift from the “queer dance party” to the “public occupation” as an impetus to riot, indicate a re-heterosexualization of the anarchist riot?

These questions beget others. Is the anarchist riot heterosexual? Is riot porn a kind of straight porn? Is there *queer* riot porn? Would a video of, say, the White Night Riots<sup>9</sup> be queer riot porn just because the rioters were gay, or is there something straight or queer about rioting tactics themselves? Did the Oscar Grant riots have a sexual orientation? Would it have changed if he had identified as queer, or if he had died in a queer bashing? Regardless of the identities of the subjects or objects of queer discourse, does it succeed in perverting us into greater acts of creative destruction?

## 9.

The White Night Riots took place in San Francisco on May 21, 1979, when gays reacted with mass violence to the announcement that Dan White, homophobic murderer of gay community leader Harvey Milk, had been convicted of mere manslaughter. Marchers left the gayborhood and stormed City Hall, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage and injuring many police.





apple. But without resorting to potentially oppressive simplifications, how can we name and confront the dynamics that constitute patriarchy?

To examine the relationship between “queer” and “feminist” discourse among anarchists today, let’s take an example: the dance party. What noun fits more snugly after queer than that? We’re all too familiar with queer dance parties—but what does a feminist dance party look like? Is that just a women’s dance party? How essentialist and identitarian, how passé. Then what makes a dance party feminist? Feminism, which at its height spawned a massive culture complete with food, clothing, music, lingo, and literature, seems to have been divested of its cultural content within our scenes, leaving a merely political critique. At best, we imagine a feminist dance party as a negation of some of the anti-feminist aspects of conventional dance parties: less misogynist music, less sexual harassment on the dance floor...

But here we run into the trap of associating feminism with an authoritarian project of control and purity. As a certain logic goes, feminism polices (speech, behavior, aesthetics) whereas queer, in contrast to gay as well as feminist, rejects policing (saying / doing / looking / wearing what I want). We think this is largely due to anti-feminist and anti-PC backlash, on both mainstream and “radical” levels—although some authoritarian feminists have certainly helped reinforce this notion. Meanwhile, queer discourse—as a pseudo-sexual and implicitly political but largely cultural and aesthetic frame-work—can stay light and fashionable, striving to make stylish fun of power rather than directly combat it.

What does “queer dance party” mean in an anarchist context, anyway? It’s not just a party for LGBT dancers, nor one in which music by queer artists will be played, nor even necessarily a dance party in which queer aesthetics will be embraced. It announces an intention to create a festive space wherein heteropatriarchal norms can be contested by just about anyone. It doesn’t rely on attendees fitting any fixed range of identities, nor sharing any specific sexual or aesthetic affinities, though it connotes some; and while it emerges from a shared political subculture, it doesn’t presume distinct political content. Who dances or goes

home with whom may not fit a gendered pattern as closely as in a gay bar, but there’s an implication that the whole experience will be more free-wheeling and sex-positive, less confined by gender norms: an exploratory and liminal space. This varies across different towns, scenes, and social networks, but in general the anarchist queer dance party tends to manifest less as a gay bar night organized by punks and more as a carnivalesque, sexy, semi-third-wave feminist temporary autonomous zone outside gender regulation.

That’s a sympathetic reading. A more critical view might contend that queer discourse functions to legitimize whatever it describes by association rather than by content. That is, it takes something that isn’t especially “radical”—yet another dance party—and positions it within the social milieu of radicalism as something that challenges heteropatriarchy without it necessarily having to do anything different. Thus, it coopts a label to pretend that something fun is actually revolutionary, while diluting its power to contest our collective norms. Some scenes are notorious for focusing nearly all “radical queer” organizing energy on dance parties, performances and the like—and while we’re not so regressive as to suggest that “cultural work” isn’t political, can we at least acknowledge that dance parties are not direct actions? That we’re unlikely to challenge state and capital just by dressing cute and shaking it together?

*Unless, that is, our queer dance parties become riots...*

## II. QUEER AS EROTICIZER OF INSURRECTION

*...as sometimes indeed they do. Why? How?*

What does queer have to do with street riots? Why did anarchists decide they wanted to riot via queer dance parties? Do we need the seductive allure of erotic

So what happened? I check out the report online. A big dance party at midnight; a car dealership, ATM, and of course an American Apparel get smashed; tussling with the cops, and one arrest, but not too serious, it seems. In breathless prose, the communiqué bellows, “*Then the homo hordes charged down Pike, the windows of two cop cars left shattered in their wake. Rainbow flags became weapons as the queers raged on down Broadway, the cops sniffing along after like rabid dogs on the prowl.*” Woof!

But then whiffs of the drama fallout begin wafting eastward, all over the internet and via pals from the left coast. One friend tells me dismissively how those “identity politics types” got all whiny about it afterwards. Maybe he was talking about the announcement that went up shortly after on the Puget Sound Anarchists website: “*Tonight was Queers Fucking Queers. Everyone was so excited for this event, it was to be the event of pride weekend. A night that was intended for queers and their allies to dance their hearts out, and enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that the night was theirs... The evening did not go as some had planned. Many people at the event would like to have a community meeting to talk about tactics and the safety of actions. No actions are safe, but there is a shared feeling of disappointment, frustration, and alienation after tonight’s events.*”

Hmm... sounds familiar. Divisions erupting around tactics and communication, around what consent and safety should look like in actions and how they relate to the identities of the participants, hurt feelings and name calling. Bash Back! is dead, and with these dance parties-cum-mini-riots radical queers seem to be generating as much or more conflict with each other as with the cops. Which way forward now for the queer insurrection?

In some ways, this is my wildest fantasy: a bunch of dykes and fags and freaks, bloc’ed up and going nuts on some college shopping district. Shit’s rolling in the street, windows are dropping like it’s hot. Who cares who fucks who? Anyway, pink is so last season; my mask is black.

Later on, I’m driving a van, scooping up friends from alleyways and commenting on the new cayenne cologne they’re sporting. Having recovered the affinity group, we split—the big white van with out-of-state plates might not attract us the kind of attention we want after our night on the town. We pass college quads where lines of riot pigs charge hapless students in U Pitt sweatshirts filming the wildness on their I-phones.

Back in safe quarters, our little all-fag cadre rinses off, talks quietly, sips tea. That was certainly different from any “queer” event we’d been to before! Even among the many (“straight”?) mobilizations we’d been to, this was a particularly spunky one. We’d later read that the Bash Back! march was the rowdiest and smashiest part of a fairly chaotic counter-convergence. We snuggled up to rest for another day of craziness, reflecting that maybe there was something to this whole queer insurrection thing.

### Seattle, 2011

So where’s the next party at? I hear there are some cuties in Seattle. This one I met at Idapalooza told me about this wild anti-Pride street festival they have there called Queers Fucking Queers, and how last year it got all rowdy. The Northwest is a little far for me to go for a dance party, even a riotous one, but I’ll keep an eye out for it.

# /kwɪ(ə)r/

## A) a sexual identity: *either*

**A1)** an umbrella term for same-sex loving people, including gay and lesbian, homo/bi/pansexual, and others who don't prefer any of those labels but have same-sex sex; **A2)** same as above, but including those who may have never had same-sex sex but might want to, or think about it sometimes, or might be open to it in the future; **A3)** a synonym for what used to be called bisexual, now that the label has fallen out of fashion: someone open to sex with multiple genders of partners, or more specifically someone who presents as lesbian or gay but also has cross-sex relationships; **A4)** an umbrella term for sexual dissidents, including *A1* but also possibly including the kinky, the polyamorous, sex workers, and otherwise sexually deviant heterosexuals; anyone who has been targeted or marginalized for sexual behavior; **A5)** that which is at odds with the social norms of sexuality. Under current arrangements of hetero-patriarchy, this entails the above, but the above isn't inherently queer in all times/places. For instance, in ancient Greece, with its socially normative traditions of male/male pederasty, queer wouldn't include same-sex sexuality per se, but modes of it that challenge hierarchical expressions of sexual power. This **A4/A5** distinction is meaningful insofar as it recognizes sexual centers and peripheries that aren't fixed but shift under all contexts.

## B) a rejection of fixed sexual identity: *either*

**B1)** adhering to an alternative framework for understanding sexuality—one's own sexual expression as well as a general understanding of what sexuality is and how it works; conceiving of it as fluid, in constant flux, and/or not organized solely

around the genders of one's partners; **B2)** a modification of the above that destabilizes not just sexuality but gender, seeing it as socially constructed, malleable, devoid of fixed meaning. The word queer alone is sometimes understood to connote this, or is sometimes further clarified as "genderqueer."

## C) a subcultural label: *either*

**C1)** an affiliation with a certain subcultural sphere and set of aesthetics, which borrows from other gay, lesbian, and transgender culture (particularly gay male, femme, and transfeminine elements) but also mixes in borrowings from various other countercultural scenes; **C2)** a variation of the above, but with an additional focus on radical politics—usually a critique of gay and lesbian assimilation, consumerism, and sometimes capitalism and the state; **C3)** a catch-all adjective connoting abject, filthy, weird, ill-fitting, atypical, freakish, disobedient, rebellious, disreputable, marginal, or otherwise excluded from normalcy and propriety; usually implying an unapologetic embrace of those qualities and the marginality they entail.

## D) a trajectory of critique: *either*

**D1)** inverting, destabilizing, or undermining fixed assumptions, binaries, and categories, following post-structuralist and deconstruction theory—e.g., a "*queer*" interpretation of biology questions the assumptions underlying the discipline; **D2)** reinterpreting material in light of sexual connotations, especially suppressed homoerotic dynamics—e.g., a "*queer*" reading of *Sherlock Holmes* throws light on the latent eroticism of his relationship with Watson.

indicates something other than current sexual practice seems to be more accessible to female-assigned than male-assigned anarchists.

On some level, it appears that queer has expanded into a sort of post-feminist signifier, without entirely displacing it. A substantial proportion of anarchists, particularly anarchist women, remain committed to feminism as an ideology and to some extent an identity, even if it doesn't get as much screen time as queer does these days. But new and complex notions of gender have challenged the relevance of old discourses arrayed against patriarchy. Queer combines a radically reframed conception of gender with a politicized celebration of sexuality, and appealing aesthetics to boot. As a result, it attracts energy that had previously flowed into feminist discourse. And as queer steps in to communicate meanings that the label feminist formerly carried, its specifically sexual content erodes.

Feminist history offers context for this de-centering of sexual practice in queer identity. The women's liberation movement of the late 1960s coined the slogan "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice." No longer would *lesbian* simply refer to women who sought sex and romance with other women; a whole new political meaning emerged, not limited to sexual desire. In a way, contemporary anarchist usage of "queer" parallels this political lesbian feminism, except without the focus on women's experience and women's oppression—the core of the analysis.

So whither gender oppression in our conceptions of "queer" today? Like that bald French guy said about sexuality in the Victorian era, it has been hidden through a proliferation of discourse, obscured through the very processes that won't shut up about it. All the queer theory complicating how we understand gender, the new practices around pronouns, the challenge to any assumption about anyone else's gender identity... have these actually served to dislodge patriarchy?

Not necessarily. At worst, they risk reinforcing it by reframing gender as a mode of individual expression rather than a force of collective domination. Shifting our identities and discourses hasn't succeeded in ending gender oppression. Thankfully, we'll never return to an essentialist Eden of gender absolutism and biology as destiny, before we bit the post-structuralist

## 7.

Bombs and Shields is a game in which each player picks one person as a bomb and another as a shield. The goal is to keep your shield between yourself and your bomb at all times, which usually involves lots of running around. In this example, the stakes are higher, as opportunist-queer anarchists attempt to keep LGBT communities as a shield between themselves and the bombs of state repression and public backlash.

## 8.

Consult "Shit (Young, White, Class-privileged, City-based) 'Radical Queers' Say to Each Other" on Youtube for authoritative documentary evidence.

Small wonder a framework that flamboyantly embraces marginality resonates with us. Queer discourse celebrates the rejection of mainstream norms—wearing black not just to distinguish ourselves from muggles, but as a tactic to *punch cops in the face and get away with it*. A framework that emerged from the experience of sexual and gender marginalization has evolved into a means of understanding political queerness.

This translates into cultural and aesthetic realms, too. Consider the campy queen's horror of the mainstream and flippant mixing of high and low culture, or lesbian feminist critiques of body norms, repressive fashion, and patriarchal accoutrements. We see hints of these trends reflected in contemporary anarchist aesthetics, from the flatbrimmed metrosexual insurrectionist who reads fashion blogs and critical theory to the hard femme with unshaven legs and hand-sewn skirts. That unrepentant pride in exclusion flows between queer and anarchist scenes even as assimilation displaces it from the former. Thus anarchists appropriate and reconfigure queer aesthetics, which resonate and communicate important messages about our self-understanding, even if we leave behind their sexual connotations.

But among anarchists, queer hasn't become entirely decoupled from LGBTetc. The **C3** sense, while increasingly common, hasn't fully displaced the **C1** and **C2** senses. In anarchist communiqués about “queer” happenings, we see persistent use of “fabulous,” “fierce,” and other stereotypically gay lingo, as well as constant references to lesbian and gay “assimilation”—even when the targets are at best tangentially related.

Is this because at least some of the participants are still invested in LGBT community, even if they primarily roll with anarchists now? Is it because of an aesthetic admiration for LGBT culture, particularly its sassy gay/trans/femme manifestations? Is it to try to legitimize anarchist tactics in LGBT communities by deploying language that emerged from their radical elements, or in the liberal mainstream by framing anarchist action as queer? At worst, the latter seems like a troubling attempt to play Bombs and Shields<sup>7</sup> with another community.

Can we justify appropriating queer discourse and separating it from its sexual content? Is there any other identity we could imagine appropriating as a point of departure for rioting? The Black Radical Congress, an SEIU convention? Renaissance Faires or Dragoncon? What are the specific conditions of queer culture that rendered it so appropriable? Is it because enough of us consider ourselves queer, regardless of whether our understanding of that resonates with non-anarchist queers, that we don't feel guilty appropriating this trajectory? Or because our contempt for mainstream gay and lesbian culture is so complete that we feel no reservations undermining it? Is that just plain homophobic? What consequences does this have for non-anarchist queers, or for queer-identified LGBT anarchists?

Ultimately, we don't think we can make sense of anarchist engagement with queer discourse through any of these lenses. And the **D1** and **D2** senses of queer are used mostly in academic contexts or mocking engagements with pop culture, so we're not going to find much more insight there. We have to look beyond this taxonomy at how queer really functions in anarchist scenes.

## I. QUEER AS POST-FEMINIST SIGNIFIER

In several anarchist scenes where queer discourses have taken root, we've observed certain gendered trends emerging. First, many people are adopting gender-neutral pronouns—but female-assigned people appear to constitute a notably larger proportion of those doing so. In one town's scene, we hear that all the female-assigned cissexual folks prefer “she” or “they” while all of the male-assigned cissexual folks prefer “he,” just he.<sup>8</sup> Next, among anarchists who identify as queer but are not often or ever in same-sex relationships, a larger proportion seems to be female-assigned than male-assigned folks. This isn't the same as saying that there are more queer (i.e. lesbian and bisexual) women in anarchist scenes than queer (i.e. gay and bisexual) men, though in some scenes that is the case. Rather, we mean that queer identity that

## A FUTILE ATTEMPT AT CLARIFICATION

**What the fuck is queer?** It's a noun, a verb, and an adjective. It's not just ambiguous (implying uncertainty as to which of multiple possible meanings is intended) or polysemous (having multiple certain meanings simultaneously)—it's a contested terrain where disparate currents compete and flow in and out of each other. *Queer* signifies different, sometimes contradictory discourses—in contrast to feminism, for example, which has different specific formulations, but all within a shared framework. It's unpredictable enough that many anarchists see it as a discursive space from which we could fuck or riot anew.

Queer discourse, as anarchists have recently deployed it, focuses on some of these senses more than others. The notion of queer as an identity tied to sexual practice may be on its way out. There are definitely more queer-themed anarchist conferences and events in recent years than a decade ago; yet the more closely the “radical queer” tendency adheres to anarchist subculture, the more diffuse the sexual practices of the participants seem to be. It used to be that every year at Washington, DC's now defunct National Conference on Organized Resistance (NCOR), every person interested in queer dates would crowd into the one queer-themed workshop, half-pretending to pay attention to the presenter while cruising the scene.<sup>5</sup> Now straight couples attend anarcho-queer gatherings together and play in anarcho-queer bands, while anarchist homos are back to the drawing board.

This seems to indicate that queer as a sexual signifier has slipped almost entirely from the **A1** sense (descriptive, reflecting where I'm at now) to the **A2** sense (aspirational, where I'm curious or interested to be) and the **B1** sense (where we're at is constantly in flux or open to change). Also, as BDSM discourse and practices proliferate in anarchist scenes, the **A3** sense of queer equaling (not just homo-)sexual deviance also seems to be expanding, with a similar blur between the actively perverse and those who aspire to greater perversity. According to some, the queer tent is big enough to encompass those who desire or even simply remain open to deviant sexual and relational practices,



5.

NCOR was a major east coast anarchist/anti-authoritarian conference held at American University every year from 1998 to 2008. The organizers (who were doing the best they could, bless their hearts) were repeatedly called out for marginalizing queer themes in the workshop schedule, to the point that for several years running there was literally only one single queer-themed workshop among over seventy—hence the situation described. One of the authors of this piece met a long-term boyfriend doing just that.

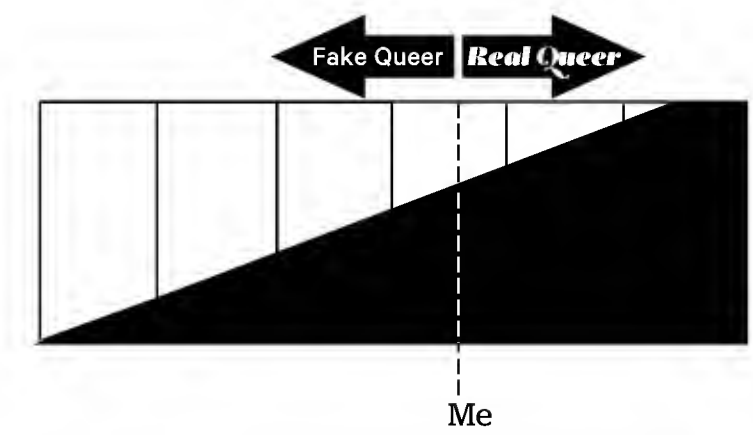
6.

Non-transsexual, having a gender identity that matches one's birth-assigned sex.

even if they have yet to enact them. In this sense, queer identity is almost metaphysical, a kind of state of mind. Its cultural and aesthetic components blend into and blur its sexual components, to the point that a self-perceived affinity is enough to smooth over the contradictions of claiming an identity that still implies a specific sexual practice to many people.

This has provoked frustration among queers whose identification with the discourse stems from specific experiences and positioning within sexual power matrices. While it's uncouth to admit in mixed company, it's common for those of us who see ourselves as “real queers” (i.e., I routinely have gay sex, I've started transitioning, I've been targeted for anti-queer violence) to perceive others who don't share certain experiences as “fake queers” (i.e., she's just Lesbian Until Graduation, ze's just hopping on this gender-neutral pronoun craze, he's just a straight manarchist who thinks that queer identity will make him more appealing to women). Between social queerness and lifestyle queerness, an unbridgeable chasm, opines a grumpy old gay Murray Bookchin.

Of course, often those most invested in policing the boundaries are those who feel the most anxiety about their own queer credentials (at least one of the authors here included). As the joke goes, a “real queer” is defined as me plus anyone to the right of me on the Kinsey scale.



Since the rules of sex/gender identity politics defend the right to self-definition as sacrosanct, it can only be fucked up to delegitimize anyone else's queer or trans or genderqueer identity. But then how can we engage with these frustrations about the diffusion of queer sexual identity almost to the point of meaninglessness?

One alternative conception distinguishes between sexual identity (internal, subjective, based on how we see ourselves) and sexual positioning (based on external placement within matrices of power and privilege, how we're seen by others). According to this reframing, the relevant basis for sexual affinity is experiences, practices, and concrete interests, rather than desires, ideas, and self-definitions. Queers whose identity is rooted in experiencing sexual marginalization may begin an exodus from “radical queer” anarchist spaces towards others organized on more specific bases of shared experience. But will this trigger constant skirmishes about who's “really queer,” with a border patrol struggling to defend ever-receding boundaries? Gender gentrification and gated communities of identity?

As trans, genderqueer, and other non-binary gender identities proliferate among anarchists, it's increasingly difficult to make sense of these boundaries. Is a cissexual<sup>6</sup> man who hooks up with a transmasculine person queer? Does it matter if his partner has engaged in this or that aspect of physical transition? What if he identifies as straight? What if his partner identifies as gay? Are dykes who go for butches less lesbian because many of their partners now use male pronouns? Are male-assigned and female-assigned folks in relationships with each other “queer” if they prefer gender-neutral pronouns?

The traditional notions of sexual identity based on the gender of one's partners can't accommodate more complex, self-determined notions of gender identity, or at least must shift dramatically in response. Some even see having a sexual orientation—a distinct pattern of attraction along body or gender lines—as somehow oppressive or tacky. Others counter that that's homophobic. It's a mess.

Perhaps these trends indicate that anarchists increasingly deemphasize the sexual identity senses of queer in favor of the **C1-C3** senses of an

aesthetic/political discourse. This suggests that queer discourse is appealing for anarchists because it poses anarchism as political queerness.

What does it mean to be an anarchist in our North America subculture today? Certainly there's more to this than believing that state and capital must be abolished in favor of a non-hierarchical society based on mutual aid. We speak of our “milieu,” our “comrades,” and joke about the difficulties of dating “muggles.” We have an array of obscure reference points, from historical events defined by a city (Seattle, Quebec City, Miami) and acronyms (ACAB, FTW, NCOR, WTO/IMF/FTAA) to splinter groups (primitivist, insurrectionist, syndicalist) with matching colors and jokes. There are the scene outlets we love to hate (A-news, Infoshop, Slingshot), the weird professors we admire or hate on each other for admiring (Foucault, Agamben, David Graeber), the petty crimes we commit less out of ideology or material need than for style, the idiosyncratic diets and hygiene...

The point is: we are a subculture so far outside the mainstream as to be incomprehensible to most of our parents, coworkers, and neighbors. In spite of our Really Really Free Markets and anarcho-good-neighborism, most of us really can't make it outside our tight-knit little world. Some couple off and secede to breed, or liberalize and disappear into the nonprofit world, but those of us who are lifers know it. We can recognize this mark of Cain on each other, even without patches. It's curious that the state hasn't already weeded us out, since we're so laughably easy to identify.

How does this relate to queer? Anarchists understand the unapologetic marginality entailed in the **C3** sense of queer. Our aesthetics and lifestyles, our political beliefs, and often our sexual practices and relationship formats (whether hetero, homo, or off the map) put us irreconcilably at odds with social norms. We bind together for mutual support in our milieu because nearly every one of us feels the crushing burden of the dominant culture telling us we are insane. We perceive patterns that most dismiss and unspeakable horrors to which most remain infuriatingly indifferent. Gutter punks and train-hoppers may look the part more than the rest of us, but whether or not it's externally expressed our exclusion remains internally palpable.